THE RISE OF THE WEHRMACHT

The German Armed Forces and World War II

Volume 1

Samuel W. Mitcham Jr.

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THE RISE OF THE WEHRMACHT

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PREFACE

The purpose of this book is both mammoth and ambitious: to write the definitive military history of Nazi Germany and its war effort during its expansion or *blitzkrieg* period. Other aspects of the Third Reich will be touched on as well, including German diplomacy, geopolitics, and the attitudes of German civilians, including their morale and how they adjusted to life under the constant threat of aerial attacks, the war economy, and so on. The Holocaust, for example, is not military history *per se,* but it did morally define the Third Reich; therefore, it will be covered as well.

Since 1960, what might be termed as ''social military historians'' have arisen in the Western world. These historians deal with war from a sociological (or, in some cases, pseudosociological) point of view, without discussing battles and campaigns, which are dismissed with a wave of the hand, if mentioned at all. I believe that war has its sociological and philosophical elements, but it also involves strategy, operations, and tactics, as well as logistics, training, the inclination of a people to wage war, and the warrior himself, be he general or private. In other words, this book will follow a more nuts-and-bolts approach, in which strategy, battles, and campaigns are emphasized, rather than sociological motivations.

I thank all those who helped in the researching, writing, and production of this book, especially my wife, Donna. I also thank Professor Melinda Mathews of the Interlibrary Loan Department of the University of Louisiana at Monroe for all of her assistance. Thanks go to the archivists and other employees at the National Archives, Washington, D.C., the Bundesarchiv, the War College, the Center of Military History, and the Imperial War Museum, as well as the late Friedrich von Stauffenberg and all those who shared information, advice,

photographs, or memoirs with me. I also thank Paul Moreau, Robert Wyatt, and Dr. Donny Elias for their assistance. Finally, thanks go to my editors, Elizabeth Demers and Heather Staines. I alone assume responsibility for any mistakes.

CHAPTER I

THE REICHSHEER

On November 9, 1918—with his country in revolt and his battered army on the verge of defeat—German Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated, and the Second Reich passed into history. Early the following morning, he boarded his gold and cream-colored private train at Spa, Belgium, and crossed into neutral Holland, to begin his exile. As a final indignity, the Supreme War Lord of Imperial Germany had to give up his sword to a Dutch customs official. Thus ended the reign of the House of Hohenzollern, after 507 years and 19 generations. The Second Reich was replaced by the democratic Weimar Republic; the Imperial Army was replaced by the *Reichsheer*. After the armistice, the Reichsheer withdrew into its bases, organized itself, and began preparing for the next war. During the Weimar era (1919–33), the army developed and existed apart from the rest of German society. Its Officers' Corps deliberately separated it and, to a large degree, isolated it from the rest of Germany. It had its own ideas, legal code, traditions, culture, and manners. To a great extent, it also formed its own society. Certainly the Officers' Corps and its elite General Staff constituted an exclusive brotherhood of their own. As a rule they viewed the Weimar Republic—to which it felt very little loyalty and less subordination—with ill-concealed contempt. They were literally a world apart from the rest of Germany and preferred it that way.

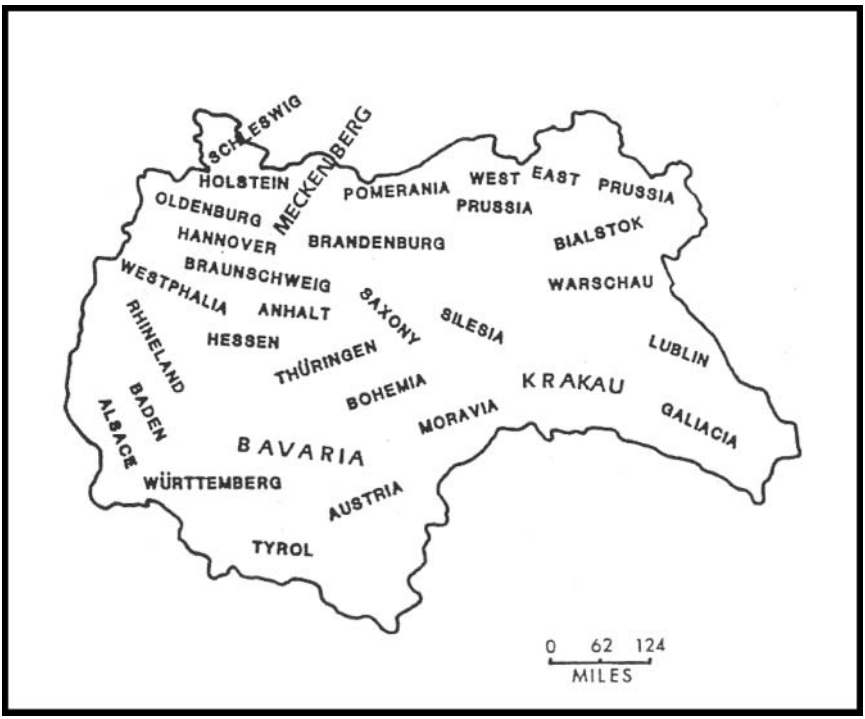
The legacy of the Reichsheer dates back to the days of Prussia and the rise of what became the House of Hohenzollern in the early fifteenth century. Prussia became, as Baron Friedrich von Leopold von Schroetter remarked, ''not a country with an army, but an army with a country.'' Under Frederick Wilhelm I, the Prussian Army became the best-trained and best-drilled army in Europe, although he avoided using it, despite a great many opportunities. His son, Frederick II (1712–86)—known to history as Frederick the Great—used it with great success, expanding his kingdom beyond its East Prussian and

Figure 1.1
Europe, 1920–38

Brandenburger heartlands and into Silesia, which he took from the Hapsburgs. It was Frederick who established the reputation of the Prussian Army as the best in Europe, based on harsh discipline, obedience, and the courage of its men, especially its officers. Under Frederick, it fought the first and second Silesian wars, the Seven Years' War, and the War of the First Partition of Poland. Unfortunately for Prussia, however, Frederick's successors, Frederick Wilhelm II and III (his nephew and grandnephew), lacked his skills, strength of will, and intelligence. As a result, the army stagnated and was finally crushed and humiliated by Napoleon in the Jena campaign of 1806.

Following the Napoleonic Peace of Tilsit (1807) and the harsh Treaty of Paris (1808), the Prussian Army was built anew under the ''reformers,'' led by General Johann von Scharnhorst. Scharnhorst shifted the emphasis of Prussian military thought and doctrine from a volunteer army obsessed with iron discipline and rigid drill to a conscripted army, stressing technological expertise, operational planning, tactical flexibility, and a highly trained and dedicated professional Officers' Corps. He and his young assistants, including Count Wilhelm

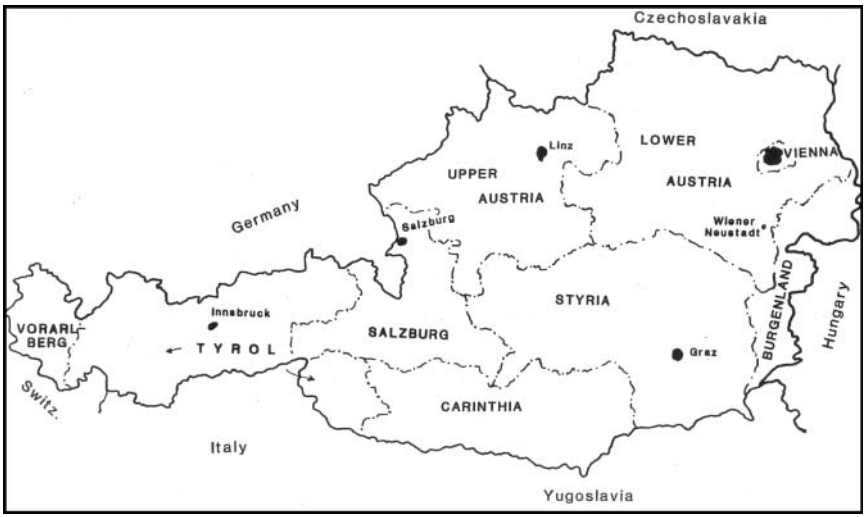
Figure 1.2
General Regions of the Third Reich



Anton Neidhardt von Gneisenau and Karl von Clausewitz, founded the *Landwehr* (the national militia), the Prussian General Staff, and the War Academy, and lay the foundations for a tradition of military excellence that endured until 1945.

Scharnhorst died of wounds he suffered in the Battle of Luetzen in 1813, but the army he created helped smash Napoleon at Leipzig and Waterloo. Although the aristocratic military reactionaries were by no means a thing of the past after 1815 (thanks to their influence with the king), the Prussian Army continued its quiet, steady development under the supervision of the General Staff until it had, in effect, institutionalized the idea of professional military excellence at all levels of the army. General Staff training was especially vigorous. Entrance into the War Academy in Berlin (where the officers of the General Staff were trained) was by competitive examination, and well over three-quarters of the applicants were eliminated at the beginning. Of the 150 officers who succeeded in gaining admission each year, only about 50 completed the course, which was gradually expanded until it was three

Figure 1.3
Austria, 1938



years long. The survivors were then assigned to the Great General Staff in Berlin for two years of additional training in topographical mapping, map exercises, and war games. Following this assignment, they participated in the annual Staff Ride, under the personal supervision of the chief of the General Staff. Finally, the top three or four candidates were chosen to wear the distinctive red trouser stripes of permanent members of the General Staff. They could look forward to more rapid promotions and better duty assignments than their contemporaries, and these candidates usually spent most of their careers alternating between positions with the Great General Staff (*Grosser Generalstab*), housed in a red brick building in the northeast corner of the Tiergarten, near the center of the government sector of Berlin, and assignments with the field forces (*Truppengeneralstab*).[1] By the 1860s, the great majority of Prussia's senior commanders had developed through this process. The king was, of course, still the official supreme commander of the army, but by now his role was largely nominal: the chief of the General Staff was the real leader of the German Army.

From 1813 until 1871, the Prussian Army enjoyed a string of unbroken successes. After the Napoleonic Wars, it smashed the Revolution of 1848, overran Schleswig-Holstein in the Danish Wars of 1848 and 1864, crushed the forces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the Seven Weeks' War of 1866, and—to the surprise of the entire

Figure 1.4
The Western Front

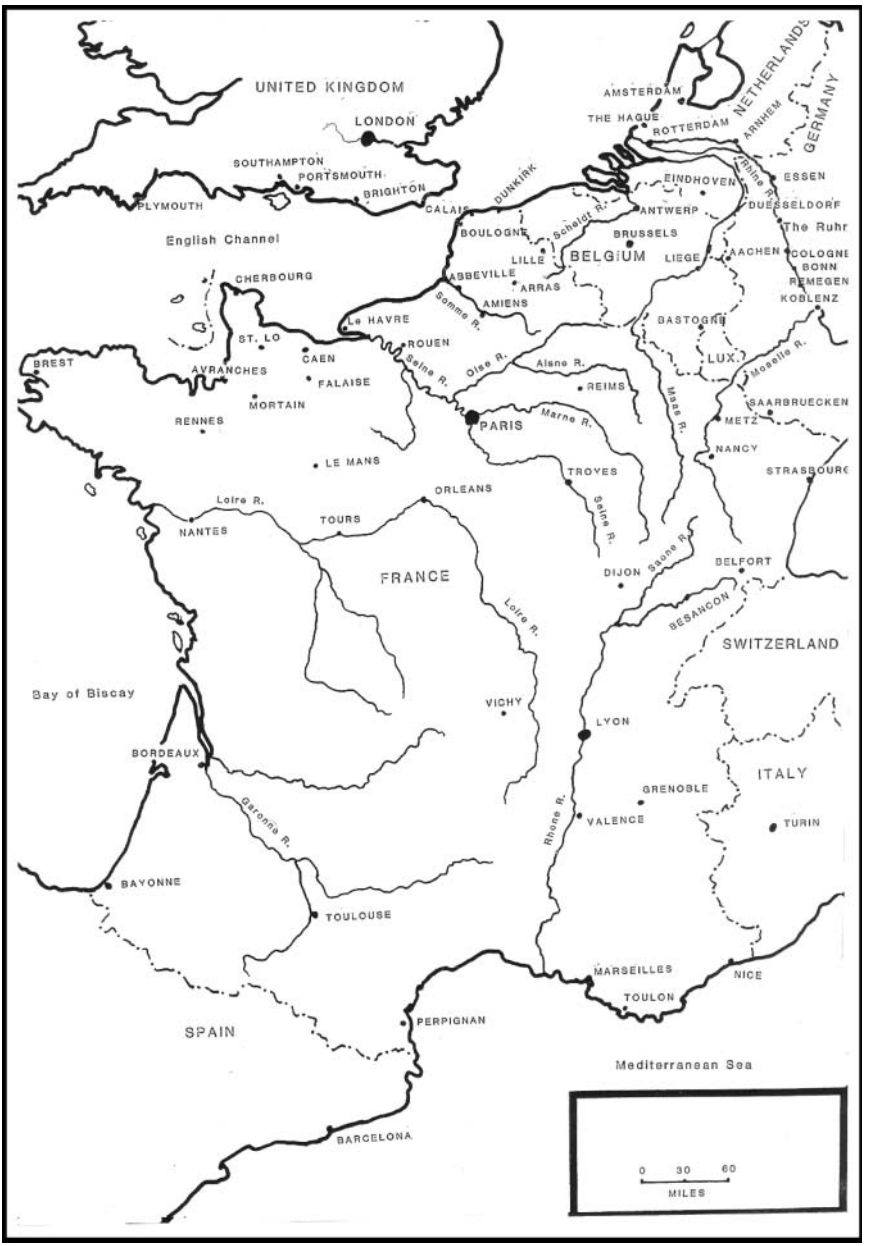
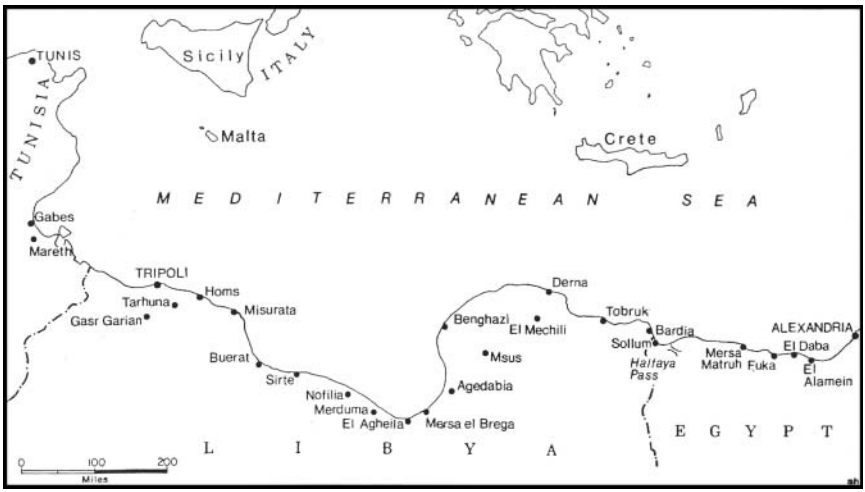


Figure 1.5
The North African Theater of Operations



world—humiliated France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. As a result, Otto von Bismarck (the ''Iron Chancellor'') was able to unite Germany and make Wilhelm I the first *kaiser* (emperor) of the Second *Reich* (empire) at Versailles in 1871. The Prussian General Staff was generally considered the best-trained professional military body in the world between then and 1914. It was copied and emulated by a great many countries during that era, including the three formerly independent German states that retained the right to keep their military establishments in time of peace: Bavaria, Wuerttemberg, and Saxony. (Even these were forced to recognize the hegemony of Berlin, however, and were subordinate to the Prussian General Staff in time of war.)

If the Prussian General Staff was considered to be a model for others to follow, German diplomacy after Wilhelm II ascended to the throne in 1890 was not. He sacked Bismarck and maneuvered the Reich into a strategic corner by 1914, when it faced the prospect of a two-front war without a single strong ally. General Count Alfred von Schlieffen, chief of the General Staff from 1891, recognized Germany's dangerous position as early as 1894 and devised a plan to deal with it. The famous Schlieffen Plan was based on the concept of a rapid mobilization and, making maximum use of railroads, called for concentrating the bulk of Germany's combat power on the right flank of the Western Front. Six of the Kaiser's eight armies would then overrun neutral Belgium and part of the Netherlands, debauch into France, and capture Paris before the British or Russians could decisively intervene.

Figure 1.6
The Eastern Front

The Schlieffen Plan probably would have worked had Schlieffen himself directed operations in 1914, but he died on January 4, 1913. Appropriately enough, his last words were: ''Strengthen the right wing.'' This advice his successor General Helmuth Johann Ludwig von

Figure 1.7
The Major Cities of Germany

Moltke, known as ''Moltke the younger,''[2] did not follow. When World War I broke out, he attacked through Belgium with 55 divisions, instead of with the 71 planned by Schlieffen. Moltke also dispensed with the 16-division follow-up force his predecessor had envisioned. Then, once the campaign had started, Moltke grew nervous about Russian advances into East Prussia, so he withdrew two corps from the main advance and sent them to the East. They arrived in Prussia after Paul Ludwig von Hindenburg, Erich Ludendorff, and Max Hoffmann had won the Battle of Tannenberg, and the Czar's forces were in full retreat. Even so, the French government fled from Paris before French General Joseph J. C. Joffre halted the German offensive on the Marne. This defeat ruined Germany's prospects for a quick victory and doomed the Reich to a long war of attrition.

Moltke the younger was replaced as chief of the General Staff on September 14, 1914, by General Erich von Falkenhayn, the minister of war of Prussia. When Falkenhayn was unable to break the stalemate on the Western Front, Wilhelm replaced him with the Hindenburg-Ludendorff team in August 1916. Ludendorff, the First Quartermaster-General,

received the title *Feldherr* (literally, ''warlord'') and was called the ''National Commander.'' He scored a number of important successes, most notably the defeat of Russia; however, he exhibited a flaw common to German General Staff officers before and since: untrained in geopolitics or international affairs, and uneducated in politics, he had too much faith in the invincibility of German arms and too little grasp of what was practical or possible on the larger scale. As a result, his Great Offensive of 1918 failed, and he was replaced by General Wilhelm Groener in late October 1918. Less than three weeks later, Germany sued for peace.

The military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles attempted to reduce the German armed forces to the status of an armed police and coast guard force by limiting the German Army to 100,000 men, including 4,000 officers.[3] So that it could never again wage offensive warfare, it was forbidden to have tanks, aircraft, poison gas, or field pieces larger than 105 millimeters. To ensure that no significant reserves were created, privates and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) had to enlist for 12 years, and officers were required to commit themselves to 25 years' service. The General Staff, the War Academy, and the cadet academies were banned, a yearly personnel turnover of more than 5 percent was prohibited, and even its ammunition supply was limited to prevent stockpiling for a major war. The German Navy was similarly restricted. It was authorized 15,000 men (including 1,500 officers) and a fleet of six obsolete battleships, six light cruisers, 12 destroyers and 12 torpedo boats, with a reserve of two battleships, two cruisers, four destroyers, and four torpedo boats. It was forbidden to have submarines, a fleet air arm, or naval guns larger than 280 millimeters (approximately 11 inches). Both branches of the service were subject to inspections by the International Control Commission.

The Law of the Creation of the Provisional Reichswehr passed the Reichstag on March 6, 1919, but it was only a stopgap measure, still leaving the army more than twice the size permitted by the treaty and lacking a permanent organizational structure. President Ebert assigned the task of submitting recommendations concerning the organization of the postwar army to a commission headed by Lieutenant General Hans von Seeckt. (See Appendix 1 for a Table of Comparative Ranks.) His recommendations were accepted with only minor modifications and became the basis of the new *Reichswehr* (Reich Defense Force or Armed Forces). The nominal commander-in-chief of the Reichswehr was the president, but actual authority was normally exercised by the defense minister.

The Reichswehr consisted of the *Reichsheer* (army) and *Reichsmarine* (navy). The former played such a predominant role (Germany was

traditionally a land power) that many came to consider the Reichswehr and Reichsheer as being identical. The tiny navy amounted to little until after the rise of Adolf Hitler. Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was not allowed to have an air force.

Because the treaty forbade the army or navy to have a commander-in-chief, the Weimar Republic's defense ministry accepted Seeckt's recommendation and created the *Heeresleitung* (army command), initially headed by a 48-year-old Wuerttemberger officer named Walter Reinhardt. Under the Army Command came the Personnel Office, the *Waffenamt* (Armament and Equipment Office, or Ordnance Office), the *Truppenamt* (Troop Office), and the Army Administrative Service.

The real power in the army was the Troop Office, which was, in reality, a clandestine General Staff. It was headed by General von Seeckt, a highly cultured Pomeranian nobleman. Known in the army as ''the Sphinx with a Monocle,'' he was short, thin, neat, and dainty in his appearance. The son of a Prussian general, he was born in Schleswig in 1866, and was commissioned second lieutenant in the elite 1st (Emperor Alexander) Foot Guards Regiment at the age of 19. He became a member of the General Staff in 1899 and soon established a reputation as a brilliant staff officer. When World War I broke out, he was chief of staff of the III Corps and distinguished himself in the Soissons breakthrough. As a result of these successes, he was named chief of staff of Field Marshal August von Mackensen's newly formed 11th Army on the Eastern Front and played a major role in the Battle of Gorlice, one of the most spectacular German victories of the war. For his part in this campaign, Seeckt was awarded the *Pour le Merite* (the ''Blue Max''). Later, he served as chief of staff of the Austro-Hungarian 12th Army and as chief of staff of the Turkish Army. During the war, Seeckt rose from the rank of lieutenant colonel to lieutenant general and proved that he was an extremely able officer who understood political problems; nevertheless, he was never given the chance to return to the Western Front, due to the animosity of Ludendorff. This worked to his advantage after the armistice, however; after serving as military advisor on the Treaty of Versailles and heading the reorganization commission, he rebuilt the General Staff (under the cover name *Truppenamt*) and established the organizational foundation that Hitler's generals would later expand into the most feared army of its time.

Seeckt's Troop Office was the chief planning agency for the army and consisted of several departments, including T 1 (operations), T 2 (organization), T 3 (statistics and intelligence), T 4 (training), and T 7 (transportation). These departments were further subdivided into office groups (*Amtsgruppen*), branches (*Abteilungen*), and sections (*Gruppen*). The lowest level of the General Staff was the *Referat* (desk). Each of these subdivisions dealt with various tasks, including a number

forbidden by the Treaty of Versailles. Group L of the operations department, for example, handled Germany's clandestine air forces and kept up with developments in aviation and military aviation, while special section T 3V handled matters relating to the secret Red Army/Reichswehr agreements and so forth. This organization was flexible and could easily be expanded to serve a much larger army.

The level of command below the Army Command was the *Gruppenkommando* (Group Command). There were two of these field army–level headquarters: Group 1 in Berlin controlled all units in northern and eastern Germany, and Group 2 in Kassel controlled those in the south and west. Under these commands came the true functional heart of the German Army: the *Wehrkreise* (military districts).

Each Wehrkreis was a corps-level territorial command that was responsible for recruitment, mobilization, supply, administration, logistical support, and all territorial and military-political (or military-civilian) matters within its area. Later, when the German Army took the field, the Wehrkreise also assumed responsibility for training as well.

Initially, there were seven military districts, all designated by Roman numerals. Wehrkreis I, headquartered in Koenigsberg, controlled the district of East Prussia, which was cut off from the rest of Germany by the Polish Corridor. Wehrkreis II, headquartered in Stettin, controlled northern Germany and included Pomerania, Mecklenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, and Luebeck. Wehrkreis III in Berlin directed Brandenburg, Silesia, and the Greater Berlin area. Wehrkreis IV in Dresden included Saxony and Anhalt. Wehrkreis V (Stuttgart) included Hesse, Thuringia, Baden, and Wuerttemberg. Military District VI (Muenster) consisted of Hanover, Westphalia, Brunswick, and Oldenburg; and Wehrkreis VII in Munich was responsible for Bavaria.

In addition to directing the military activities in their territories, each Wehrkreis commander was also the commander of an infantry division, which bore the same number as the Wehrkreis, although the two commands were technically separate. As divisional commander, the general was responsible for the training and operations of his division. The Wehrkreis commander thus had two jobs and was responsible to two bosses. As a corps-level district commander, he was directly responsible to the Army Command in Berlin. As division commander, he was responsible to the Group Commander for operations, administration, and supply. Wehrkreise I through IV were subordinate to Group Command 1, and Wehrkreis V, VI, and VII reported to Headquarters, Group 2, in Kassel. When the Nazi-era military expansion began in 1935, the Wehrkreise commanders gave up their divisions and became true corps commanders in every sense.

Each infantry division consisted of three infantry regiments, an artillery regiment, and reconnaissance, signal, engineer, and anti-tank

battalions, as well as smaller medical, supply, administration, service, and veterinary units. Each division had approximately 12,000 men, although this figure increased to the 15,000–17,000 range after 1935. From then until the fall of 1941, it was not uncommon for a division to control 20,000 men, counting temporarily attached smaller units.

Until 1935, each German infantry division had two deputy commanders: the *Artillieriefuehrer* and the *Infanteriefuehrer* (artillery commander and infantry commander, respectively). These men were normally major generals who commanded the divisional units of their branches, as well as any units attached to them by the division commander. These men frequently functioned as battle group (*Kampfgruppe*) commanders in the many divisional maneuvers.

The most important officer on the divisional staff was the Ia (the chief of operations), who was, in effect, divisional chief of staff (although this term was used only at the corps level and higher). When the division went to the field, the staff usually divided into three separate operational groups: the *Fuehrungsabteilung* (operations staff), the *Quartermeister* (the supply staff), and the *Adjutantur* (personnel staff). The *Fuehrungsabteilung* (which included the intelligence officer [Ic] and his staff) was the most important. Directed by the Ia, it formed with division's tactical nerve center and was known as the division's command post (CP).

The supply headquarters (*Quartermeister*) was headed by the Ib (chief supply officer or divisional quartermaster). Physically separated from the CP, it included the IVa (chief administrative officer), IVb (chief medical officer), and V (motor transport officer), each of whom directed his own section. Most of these officers were not members of the General Staff; as a general rule, only I-type officers (the Ia, Ib, and so on) were General Staff graduates.

The personnel group (or *Adjutantur*) was the third staff grouping. Generally some distance to the rear, it was directed by the IIa (chief personnel officer or adjutant). He supervised the IIb (second personnel officer),[4] the III (chief judge advocate), and the chaplain (IVd), as well as various other units needed to keep a staff headquarters and divisional rear area functioning normally, such as security detachments, construction engineer units, labor battalions, and replacement units. Appendix 2 shows the German staff positions for divisions through army groups during World War II.

The basic combat unit of the infantry division was, of course, the infantry regiment. In the Reichswehr era, each infantry division had three such regiments, and each infantry regiment had three infantry battalions, numbered I, II, and III. Each battalion controlled four companies: I Battalion had the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th companies; II Battalion controlled the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th companies; and III Battalion

directed the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th companies. All of these were infantry (rifle) companies, except the 4th, 8th, and 12th, which were the battalion-heavy weapons companies and included heavy machine-gun and mortar platoons. The 13th and 14th companies were the infantry cannon and anti-tank companies and were directly subordinate to the regimental commander.

The Reichsheer also had three cavalry divisions, which consisted of six small cavalry regiments and one artillery battalion each—a total strength of 5,300 men. The commanders of the cavalry divisions were junior in rank to the Wehrkreise commanders, had no territorial responsibilities themselves, and were subordinate to the district commanders in times of emergency. Most of the time, however, they were directly under the command of their Group Headquarters. Group 1 controlled the 1st Cavalry Division (headquartered at Frankfurt-am-Oder) and the 2nd Cavalry at Breslau. The 3rd Cavalry Division at Weimar came under the jurisdiction of Group 2.

Before the 100,000-man army could be established, tens of thousands of officers and hundreds of thousands of other ranks had to be involuntarily discharged from the service. Generals Reinhardt and von Seeckt disagreed on the type of officer to be retained. Reinhardt wanted to keep primarily frontline soldiers; Seeckt wanted to keep as many General Staff officers as possible. This issue was by no means settled on March 12, 1920, when the Kapp Putsch rocked the foundations of the Weimar Republic. It was sparked when the government in Berlin, acting on the orders of the Allied Control Commission, tried to dissolve the *Freikorps*—right-wing paramilitary organizations that the Weimar government had been using to suppress Communist revolts. At 1 A.M. the following morning, with the rebellious Ehrhardt Naval Brigade marching unopposed on the capital, Gustav Noske, the defense minister, met with the leaders of the Reichsheer in his office in the defense ministry. Present were Generals Reinhardt, von Seeckt, Burghard von Oven, and Baron von Oldershausen; Admiral Alfred von Trotha; and six field-grade officers, including Major Kurt von Hammerstein, the son-in-law of General Baron Walter von Luettwitz, the senior rebel military commander. Noske wanted to use force against the Putschists, and he was backed by General Reinhardt, the chief of the Army Command. Reinhardt, however, was tolerated by the Officers' Corps, rather than respected by it. He had liberal views, was a true believer in the Republic and its ideals, and had made too many compromises with the democratic politicians to suit the officers of the old school; in addition, he lacked seniority and had not even reached general rank until December 1918, when he became war minister of Prussia. The real power in the military lay with Hans von Seeckt, who solemnly declared: ''Troops do not fire on troops.'' In other words, Seeckt would

not risk a civil war, even if it meant allowing the insurrectionists to capture Berlin and overthrow the regime. Of those present, only Noske, his personal adjutant, and Reinhardt voted to use force to protect the government. Noske, President Ebert, and the bulk of the cabinet were forced to flee into the night; the Putsch was only defeated because the government called for a massive general strike, which brought the life of the country to a halt and forced Wolfgang Kapp (the civilian leader of the Putsch who was largely a figurehead for Luettwitz) to ''resign'' on March 17. He then fled to Sweden.

In the aftermath of the attempted coup, General von Seeckt was left as the unchallenged leader of the defense establishment. As soon as the Putsch collapsed, he personally replaced General von Luettwitz as commander of Group 1. He quickly removed the commanders of Wehrkreise I and II from their posts for supporting the coup. Seeckt also played a role in forcing the resignations of Noske (March 24) and Reinhardt (March 25). Reinhardt was forced to retire because he could not get troops to obey his orders in a crisis situation and because he had ordered German troops to fire on other German troops. General von Seeckt replaced him as chief of the Army Command the very day he resigned. Seeckt would be the undisputed dictator of the German armed forces for the next six critical years. He had a unique opportunity to build an army in accordance with his own ideas, and he took full advantage of it.

Hans von Seeckt considered the mass armies of 1914 obsolete. They were, he said, unmaneuverable, poorly trained, and far too expensive. The next war, he predicted, would be won by smaller, mobile armies with superior training and equipment. He attached the greatest value to training and also emphasized the importance of mechanization, motorization, and air power. Overruling the recommendations of his own personnel staff, he insisted that at least 180 of the officers of the new Reichsheer be former Air Service officers.

To man the new ''100,000 man army,'' and especially the 4,000 man Officers' Corps, General von Seeckt and his colleagues had the pick of the best of more than 270,000 German officers who had survived the Great War. Their selections were based on high professional accomplishments and demonstrated efficiency; intelligence and high standards of educational achievement; ''correctness'' in both professional and private life; a strong sense of tradition and generally promonarchist political views; and a desire to isolate the army from the politics of the Weimar Republic. General Staff officers received preference in selection over non–War Academy graduates, and younger officers were preferred to older ones.

Seeckt and his staff drew their officers from three general categories: (1) General Staff officers; (2) Freikorps veterans; and (3) the junior

officer ranks of the pre-1914 Imperial Army. Their selections were extremely important in the history of Nazi Germany and World War II, because the officers they selected led Hitler's army groups, armies, corps, and air fleets from 1939 until the very end. Some officers fell into all three categories, but most did not. The old Imperial Army had been devastated by the war. Of the 22,112 officers on active duty when the war began, 11,357—more than 50 percent—were killed in action before the armistice.[5] As a general rule, the new army was disproportionately dominated by the aristocrats. In February 1927, for example, 25 of its 42 generals were noblemen; 45 of its 105 colonels were nobles; and 162 of the 724 officers assigned to the defense ministry were nobles. The cavalry was especially dominated by ''the vons'': 265 of its 596 officers were aristocrats.[6] Only 0.74 percent of the general population was of noble birth.[7]

One type of officer not often retained was the *Einjaehrig-Freiwilliger*. Typically, these were 17 or 18 year olds who served at the front for a time and then underwent a hasty officers' basic course at an officers' training school. They were jeeringly called ''90-day wonders'' by enlisted men (but seldom to their faces, because they enjoyed some of the same rights as the most senior Prussian general—such as that of boxing an enlisted man's ears anytime they felt provoked. An ''ear boxing'' in the Prussian Army was designed to burst an ear drum.) Many of these volunteer officers entered the Freikorps after the war, joined the provincial police in the early 1920s, and ended up back in the army in the 1930s, typically as a major. A great many of them served as regimental officers during World War II, and quite a few became generals. The fact that officers of this caliber were not seriously considered for retention in the Reichsheer is an indication of the high quality of the candidates available to General von Seeckt in 1920. This is also why the German Army viewed the police as a potential source of reserves throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Seeckt would not tolerate prima donnas in his army. ''The form changes, the spirit remains,'' he said when he set up the Truppenamt. ''It is the spirit of silent, selfless devotion to duty in the service of the Army. General Staff officers have no names.''[8] For him, it was intolerable for officers to meddle in politics (although he periodically meddled in them himself). ''Great achievements, small display; more reality than appearance'' became a motto of the General Staff officer.[9]

After the initial selections, the decision on which officers to choose for the regimental and company-level appointments usually fell to the colonel involved. As one might expect, this man almost invariably selected candidates whom he believed to have outstanding leadership potential, largely because it was in his own best interests to do so. About 400 exceptionally talented NCOs and *Feldwebel-Leutnant*

(sergeant-major-lieutenant or acting second lieutenant) received permanent commissions in this way. [10]

Once an officer was selected for the Reichsheer, his rate of promotion was very slow, as is still typical in a small army. For example, Erwin Rommel, who later earned distinction as the ''Desert Fox'' in World War II, entered the Reichsheer as a captain in 1919, having been promoted the year before. He was not promoted again until 1932, when he had 14 years' time in grade. Kurt Student, a future colonel general and ''father'' of the German parachute branch, was a captain from 1917 until 1929. Hans Jeschonnek, a future *Generaloberst* (colonel general), was a lieutenant for 17 years. Most other junior officers were promoted with equal slowness. Some future World War II generals, in fact, served full 12-year enlistments without ever receiving their commissions. Examples of these include Major General Ludwig Heilmann, future commander of the 5th Parachute Division; General of *Schutzstaffel* (SS) Willi Bittrich, commander of the II SS Panzer Corps in the Battle of Arnhem; and SS Major General Helmuth Becker, commander of the 3rd SS Panzer Division ''Totenkopf.''

The postwar intake of potential officers was very small; therefore, the standards they had to meet were very high. Preference went to those under 21 years of age with a higher education. They served 15 months in their regiments as enlisted men and, if still considered suitable, took their *Fahnenjunker* examination. Prior to World War I, other officer candidates (those coming straight out of schools or universities) entered the ranks as *Fahnenjunkern* (officer cadets). They ate in the officers' mess (but were not allowed to speak unless spoken to) and could sleep in private accommodations after six weeks' service. Then they went on to a war school (*Kriegschule*). The procedures were similar during the Reichswehr era, but the standards were much higher. If the Reichsheer candidate passed his Fahnenjunker exam, he was promoted to *Faehnrich* (senior officer cadet or officer candidate) and sent to the corporals' course at the infantry school at Dresden, regardless of his branch. Then he took the officers' examination. If he passed, he was promoted to *Oberfaehnrich* (roughly equivalent to ensign or senior candidate) and joined the officers' mess of his regiment. After a certain period of time, he was accepted or rejected for the rank of second lieutenant by a vote of the officers of the regiment. This was usually just a formality; if the colonel wanted a Oberfaehnrich commissioned, it would be almost unheard of for the officers to reject him. In any case, the entire process took between four and five years from the date of the candidate's enlistment.

Twice a year the recruitment of enlisted men took place. A successful volunteer had to be single, between 17 and 21 years of age, with no criminal record, and in excellent physical condition. The choice

concerning who to accept was left to the company, battery, or troop commanders, who functioned as their own recruiting officers. They thus had a great deal of interest in only choosing the best men available. Most of the recruits had political views identical to those of the officer selecting him, which meant they were conservative, nationalistic, and often pro-monarchist and anti-republican. Men from rural areas were generally preferred to city dwellers, because they were usually in better physical condition and tended to be more conservative. Their training and discipline was strict but generally fair and without the abuse and brutality of the Kaiser's day. The fact that the NCOs were more closely supervised and of a generally higher quality than those of the Imperial Army were the major reasons behind this change.

Like their officers, enlisted men and NCOs could not marry without official permission. This permission usually was not granted until after a soldier's 27th birthday. The soldier's commanding officer investigated and usually interviewed the prospective wife. Once he was satisfied that she was morally unstained and came from a respectable family, he would forward the application with a recommendation for approval. Final approval had to come from the defense ministry, but an officer's recommendation was only very rarely reversed.

Under Seeckt's supervision, the army became a state within a state, but it was also a highly professional body of dedicated men, all trained to assume command of the unit above their own. Despite the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, it was an army capable of extremely rapid expansion, should an emergency arise; that, indeed, was the cornerstone of its existence, which is what its members longed for. Its sergeants were trained to be platoon leaders, its lieutenants were fully qualified as company commanders, and its captains were perfectly capable of commanding battalions. Its field maneuvers and training problems were the best in the world, and its men became so good at staff study and war games they almost turned them into arts forms. Even in this highly skilled collection of soldiers, however, the General Staff officers stood out. (Seeckt clandestinely reintroduced General Staff training almost as soon as the Allies outlawed it.) By 1933, for example, all officers who reached 10 years service were required to take the Wehrkreis exam, which measured their professional ability. Only those in the top 15 percent were considered for General Staff training. Of those selected, only about a third passed the rigorous course and became General Staff officers.[11] Their training, of course, could not be conducted at the *Kriegsakademie* (War Academy), which had been closed in March 1920, under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Under Seeckt and his successors, it was carried on in the Wehrkreise and by special courses held by the Truppenamt. Other than that, however, little had changed. The course was just as rigorous as it had ever been.

No officer in the Reichsheer considered it in any way wrong or dishonorable to circumvent the hated Treaty of Versailles; indeed, the treaty was so onerous that its violation was considered a patriotic act. This view was held not only by the army, but by much of the civilian population as well. Even relatively liberal chancellors, such as Gustav Stresemann and Dr. Wilhelm Marx (of the People's Party and the Catholic Center Party, respectively), were not adverse to secretly breaking it. Seeckt and his men became experts at hiding stockpiles of equipment and ammunition, although the Inter-Allied Control Commission occasionally caught some of them red-handed. At the Rockstroh Works in Heidenau, Saxony, for example, the Commission discovered 600 howitzers, along with 342 breechblocks and other components of howitzers, in November 1921. Beneath the floor, in good condition, were five howitzer rifling machines, which were important in the construction of guns.[12] But the Commission only unearthed a fraction of the armaments that the Reichsheer hid for possible use in a future crisis. Even so, Seeckt felt the need to establish training bases for the two skill areas he felt would be most needed in a future war: mobile (especially panzer) operations and military aviation. For this reason, he advocated an alliance of convenience with the other piranha nation of Europe: the Soviet Union. Seeckt thought it entirely possible to set up tank and aviation schools in Russia, far from the prying eyes of the Allies. After extended negotiations, he was able to establish a major German flying base at Lipetsk, north of Voronezh, in 1924. It had two runways and a large complex of hangars, repair shops, administrative and living quarters, and service facilities, including a modern hospital. The Reichsheer was thus able to keep abreast of advances in military aviation, to conduct experiments in land-ground communications and close air support, to test new equipment, and to produce skilled pilots, observers, and aerial gunners (who could later train others), as well as technical and support personnel. The fact that the *Luftwaffe* (the German Air Force) had a trained nucleus of professionals in 1935 was largely due to the efforts Seeckt had made in the early 1920s.

General von Seeckt was also able to secure Soviet agreement to allow the Germans to open a tank school at Kama (near Kazan), but it did not open until 1929, because Germany could not manufacture or purchase the necessary tanks, and the Red Army refused to supply them. His attempts to acquire facilities for the manufacture of poison gas were unsuccessful.

The beginning of the end of the Seeckt era started with the election of Paul Ludwig von Hindenburg to the presidency in 1925. Seeckt and Hindenburg had never gotten along particularly well, and, with the elevation of the old field marshal, Seeckt was no longer the undisputed authority on military affairs within the government. Also, the bright,

intellectual, and conceited chief of the Army Command made the less astute Hindenburg uneasy.

In the fall of 1926, Prince Wilhelm (the eldest son of the Crown Prince) took part in the maneuvers of the 9th Infantry Regiment, which was garrisoned at Potsdam and had inherited the traditions of the Prussian Foot Guards. A newspaper got wind of the story (which was secretly leaked to the press by Colonel Kurt von Schleicher) and learned that Wilhelm had even appeared in uniform. Naturally the left-wing and moderate politicians and press wasted no time in calling for the general's head. On October 1, Seeckt met with the defense minister, Dr. Otto Gessler, and told him that he knew nothing about the matter. A few days later, however, he was forced to admit that this was not true. This latest revelation infuriated Dr. Gessler, who asked for Seeckt's resignation on October 5. Seeckt probably would have survived the storm had he told Gessler the whole truth on October 1. This civilian defense minister stood a little in awe of high-ranking officers in general and of Seeckt in particular, and he had both stood up for and covered for Seeckt before. This latest outrage, however, was too much for him.[13]

Hans von Seeckt was succeeded as chief of the General Staff by Wilhelm Heye (1920–22), Otto Hasse (1922–26), Wilhelm Wetzell (1926–27), Werner von Blomberg (1927–29), Baron Kurt von Hammerstein (1929–30), and Wilhelm Adam (1930–33). His successors as chief of the Army Command were Colonel General Wilhelm Heye (1926–30) and General Kurt von Hammerstein (1930–34). After Seeckt retired, the higher levels of the army became increasingly dominated by Lieutenant General Kurt von Schleicher, who became especially influential after General Groener succeeded Dr. Gessler as defense minister on January 20, 1928. Although Schleicher brought the army into politics to a greater degree than Seeckt would have ever allowed, he and his cronies did very little to change the basic structure established by Hans von Seeckt. It survived intact until 1935, and, in an expanded form, until early 1945—almost until the end of the Hitler regime.

NOTES

1. T. N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War* (1984), pp. 47–48 (hereafter cited as Dupuy, *Genius*).

2. Moltke the younger's uncle, Field Marshal Helmuth Karl Bernard von Moltke (1800–91), was known as ''Moltke the elder.'' He had been chief of the General Staff from 1857 until 1888, and had led the Prussian armies to victory in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71).

3. This figure excludes 300 medical and 200 veterinary officers, which were allowed by the Allies.

4. The IIa handled officer personnel matters. The IIb was responsible for keeping the records and handling personnel matters for enlisted men.

5. Robert G. L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918–1923* (1952), pp. 45–46.

6. W. E. Hart, *Hitler's Generals* (1944).

7. Richard Grunberger, *The 12-Year Reich* (1971), p. 22 (hereafter cited as Grunberger).

8. A. H. Farrar-Hockley, *Student* (1973), pp. 28–29.

9. Verner R. Carlson, ''Portrait of a German General Staff Officer,'' *Military Review* 70 (April 1990), p. 71. This excellent article is based largely on Colonel Carlson's interviews with F. W. von Mellenthin.

10. For the best English language book on the Reichswehr during the Seeckt era, see Harold J. Gordon, Jr., *The Reichswehr and the German Republic, 1919–1926* (1957). For his discussion of sergeant-lieutenants and the establishment of the Provisional Reichswehr, see ff. 53.

11. Joachim Kramarz, *Stauffenberg* (1967), p. 38 (hereafter cited as Kramarz).

12. W. E. Hart, pp. 164–65.

13. Seeckt was elected to the Reichstag in 1930. Initially an opponent of the Nazis (his wife was partially Jewish), he eventually became a Hitler supporter. In return, Hitler declared Frau von Seeckt an ''honorary Aryan.'' She was thus not subject to discrimination or (later) the Holocaust. After he left politics, Seeckt wrote a book, *Gedanken Eines Soldaten* (*Thoughts of a Soldier*) (published in 1935) and served as an advisor to Chiang Kai-shek (1933–35). He died of heart disease in Berlin on December 27, 1936. See Hans Meier-Welcker, *Seeckt* (1967).

CHAPTER II
ENTER ADOLF HITLER

Adolf Hitler both hated and feared the General Staff because it was the only body in the Reich that had the power to block his plans or even depose him. His rise to the chancellorship of Germany on January 30, 1933, initially affected the army not at all. In fact, Hitler's defense minister, General Werner von Blomberg, had been appointed the day before by President von Hindenburg, who had not even bothered to consult with the future Fuehrer.

Hitler began to curry favor in the armed forces on February 2, 1933, his fourth day in office. Because Blomberg did not yet have a suitable residence in Berlin, Hitler first met with his generals at Number 14 Bendlerstrasse, the apartment of General von Hammerstein. After dinner, an obviously nervous Fuehrer addressed the commanders for more than two hours. Hitler promised every possible support for the defense establishment. He called for the eradication of the evils of pacifism, Marxism, and democracy. He declared that Germany must arm and obtain *Lebensraum* (''living space'') in the East. The generals took this to mean it must be taken at the expense of their hated enemy, Poland. Hitler declared that he intended to reintroduce conscription and to concentrate his efforts on the ideological education of the nation, in preparation for war, while the military secretly expanded and rearmed. Naturally, this process would take several years. The army and navy would be free to work entirely unhindered within their professional spheres.

Hitler could hardly have made a more pro-military speech than the one he delivered; however, it evoked a mixed reaction. Some naturally saw the prospect of promotion dancing before their eyes. The immediate reaction of Admiral Erich Raeder, the chief of the Naval Command, was that ''no Chancellor has ever expressed himself so warmly in favor of defense.'' Colonel Friedrich Fromm, however, was uneasy about Hitler's references to war, and Lieutenant General Wilhelm von Leeb

remarked: ''A businessman whose wares are good does not need to boost them in the loudest tones of a market crier.'' The astute and morally solid Leeb thought that Hitler was trying to bribe them.[1] General von Blomberg, the defense minister, disagreed. After enthusiastically expressing his approval of Hitler's speech, he immediately established a basic policy of cooperation between the armed forces and the Nazi regime.

Werner Eduard Fritz von Blomberg was a romantic. Tall, broad shouldered, and physically impressive, he was born in Stargard, Pomerania, the son of a Prussian colonel, on September 2, 1878. Born to be a soldier, he attended the cadet school at Gross-Lichterfelde and was commissioned second lieutenant in the 73rd Fusilier Regiment in 1897. Despite the fact that he was not promoted to first lieutenant until 1907, his early career progressed satisfactorily in those days of slow promotion. He attended the War Academy (1904–7), became a member of the General Staff in 1908, and was promoted to captain in 1911. During World War I (in which both of his brothers were killed), he distinguished himself as both a General Staff and combat officer on the Western Front. He emerged from the conflict a major and a holder of the *Pour le Merite*.

During the Reichsheer era, Blomberg served as a brigade chief of staff (1920–21) and chief of staff of Wehrkreis V (1921–24). In 1924, he was appointed chief of army training by General von Seeckt. Seeckt's successor, Colonel General Wilhelm Heye, very much liked and respected Blomberg, and promoted him to acting major general and chief of the Troop Office (and clandestine chief of the General Staff) in 1927. Heye openly viewed the tall Pomeranian as his heir-designate as chief of the Army Command and saw to it that he was promoted to lieutenant general in 1929.

Blomberg's professional competence and rapid advancement excited the jealousy of Kurt von Schleicher, who plotted to have him removed. The idealistic chief was no match for the master intriguer, who had the support of the defense minister, Wilhelm Groener. The pair saddled him with the responsibility for some border security violations, which soon had the leftists in the Reichstag clamoring for Blomberg's dismissal in 1929. He was relieved of his duties as chief of the Truppenamt (secret General Staff), and General Heye had to personally intervene to salvage his career. He sent his unfortunate friend on a temporary tour of duty to the United States (to let things cool down) and then named him commander of Wehrkreis I, the isolated military district of East Prussia, at the end of the year. Schleicher's friend and nominee, Lieutenant General Baron Kurt von Hammerstein, replaced Blomberg as chief of the General Staff and eventually succeeded Heye as head of the Army Command on October 18, 1930.

Blomberg's career seemed to have reached a dead end. He also had heavier responsibilities than any other commander in the Reichswehr, because his territory was separated from the rest of Germany by the Polish Corridor and was surrounded by a hostile Poland on three sides. Conceivably, he might have to face the entire Polish Army with his single division (the 1st Infantry) with his back to the sea—and without tanks, airplanes, or heavy artillery. Small wonder that his chief of staff, Colonel Walter von Reichenau, made contact with the Nazis. He wanted to use their paramilitary *Sturmabteilung* (Storm Troopers or SA, also known as the Brownshirts) as military auxiliaries under Wehrkreis command, in case of war with the Poles. Soon, however, Reichenau's interest extended far beyond that.

Although he looked like a typical Prussian officer—close-cut hair, monocle, stern face—Walter von Reichenau was anything but typical. The son of a Prussian general (he was born in Karlsruhe in 1884), Walter entered the Imperial Army at age 18 as a Fahnenjunker in the 1st Prussian Guards Field Artillery Regiment in 1903. He married a Silesian countess, attended the War Academy, and served as a General Staff officer under Major General Max Hoffmann, the military genius behind so many brilliant German victories on the Eastern Front, including Tannenburg. Somewhere, however, Walter von Reichenau broke the mold. In addition to being enormously competent professionally, he was a sportsman who enjoyed automobile racing, swimming, tennis, boxing, and cross-country running, and he was a member of the German Olympic Committee. He studied science, enjoyed the company of civilians (especially foreigners), was progressive, loved to travel, roomed for a time with the son of Chiang Kai-shek, and spoke English when at home. He was independently minded, to the point of attending Jewish World War I veterans' dinners in uniform, even after Hitler took power. Reichenau also detested deskwork and anything that smelled of traditionalism for traditionalism's sake. On the other hand, he was supremely self-confident, overwhelmingly ambitious, cold-blooded, and absolutely ruthless. Even before the war, he executed soldiers for being AWOL (away without leave). Later, in Russia, when the SS death squads were executing tens of thousands of Jews, Reichenau was upset—because the SS was using too much ammunition. He officially suggested that they limit themselves to two bullets per Jew. (Obviously, he made a distinction between German and non-German Jews.)

Reichenau's ultimate goal, as far as we know, was to be commander-in-chief of the German Army, but one gets the impression that, in his heart of hearts, his final objective was much higher. Naturally, Reichenau did not get along well with General Kurt von Schleicher. As political animals, they were too much alike, and Reichenau was much the

superior soldier. The fact that they were both lady's men might have had something to do with their mutual disdain. In any case, in early 1931, Schleicher arranged to have Reichenau transferred from Berlin (where he was chief of staff to the inspector of signals at the defense ministry) into professional exile in the isolated post of Koenigsberg, where he became chief of staff of Wehrkreis I.

Colonel von Reichenau was introduced to Adolf Hitler by his uncle, Friedrich von Reichenau, a retired diplomat and the head of the German Overseas League. Like his uncle, Walter jumped on the Hitler bandwagon. Unlike most of the Fuehrer's supporters, however, von Reichenau's admiration for Hitler had nothing to do with his decision. He saw the party as a revolutionary movement of incredible power, and he wanted to harness that power in the interests of his own career. He therefore broke with the pro-monarchist Prussian officer caste and became a Nazi. Reichenau was, as Goerlitz wrote, ''the first military expert of real importance who placed himself entirely without reservation at the dictatorship's disposal.''[2]

Reichenau's commander, Blomberg, was much easier to influence, and his cold-blooded, Machiavellian chief of staff already dominated him intellectually. Reichenau introduced the general to Adolf Hitler, who completely captivated the hopelessly romantic district commander, who saw in Hitler the authoritarian figure that he and Germany needed—a sort of reincarnation of the Kaiser. (In President Hindenburg's defense, it must be noted that he was not aware of the influence Hitler held over Blomberg when he appointed him as defense minister in January 1933.) One of Blomberg's first acts was to name Reichenau chief of the *Ministeramt* (Ministerial Office), the job formerly held by Schleicher (who became chancellor in 1932—the last anti-Nazi to hold that job in the Weimar era) and then by his devoted follower, Colonel Kurt von Brelow. Blomberg also promoted both Reichenau and Brelow to major general—the latter on the retired list. He also politically isolated Lieutenant General Baron Kurt von Hammerstein (a Schleicher ally and a strong anti-Nazi) and forced him to retire on February 1, 1934.

The Ministerial Office, which was soon upgraded to the Armed Forces Office (*Wehrmachtamt*), was extremely important. Reichenau was, in effect, deputy defense minister in charge of political and general armed forces matters. In his new post, Reichenau negotiated a series of agreements between the defense minister, the SA, and the Nazi Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeitpartei*, or NSDAP). Among other things, the army agreed to give short, weekend training courses to the Brownshirts; to allow for increased contact between the party and the soldiers; and to provide the Nazis with opportunities to distribute propaganda to the soldiers in the lower ranks of the armed

forces, who were less likely to be critical or analytical of this propaganda than those of field grade and above.[3] Initially at least, Reichenau and Blomberg tried to cooperate and work with all branches of the NSDAP, including Ernst Roehm, the commander of the SA, and his Storm Troopers. Roehm, however, was not interested in cooperating with the Reichswehr.

Meanwhile, Adolf Hitler established his dictatorship. By mid-1933, he had effectively gained control of all German institutions except two: the armed forces and the presidency. He also had a major problem: the SA was on a collision course with the Reichswehr, and both Hindenburg and the army (not to mention the German people) were sick of the ''Brown Terror,'' as the SA's program of continued political violence was called.

By July 1933, Hitler clearly wanted to end the revolution and consolidate his gains. Roehm, however, did not. He openly called for a ''Second Revolution.'' Unlike Hitler, Roehm was a genuine socialist and a strong anti-capitalist who, now that the NSDAP was in power, wanted all of the spoils of political victory. Of him, Sir John Wheeler-Bennett wrote:

> To me, Ernst Roehm was the most malign and dangerous of all. This was not so much because he was a homosexual, and a pretty promiscuous one at that—but because he was that hazardous amalgam: a dreamer, a brave man, and a man of action. His war record had been an excellent one.... But for him the war had never ended. Germany might have lost it but she would win the next and he, Roehm, would win it for her. He dreamed of leading revolutionary armies fired with the ideals of national socialism across a decadent Europe. He saw himself as the Carnot, the ''organizer of victory'' of the Nazi revolution and to this end he transformed the SA into a private army.... Repulsive to look at, his fat cheeks criss-crossed with dueling scars, unimpressive at the outset, yet with a certain compelling force.[4]

Roehm wanted to command and redesign the army in conformity with (his) National Socialist ideas. Hitler needed the support (or at least the acquiescence) of the army, however, not only to stay in power but also to secure the succession to Hindenburg for himself, to complete his dictatorship, to provide the technical skill to plan and carry out German rearmament, and, eventually, to wage war. The dispute between these two powerful, strong-willed, and ruthless men dominated German politics for the next year.

Reichenau tried in vain to reach a compromise with the Brownshirt commander. In late 1933, he proposed that the SA be expanded, and that it come under the command of the army as a sort of Nazi militia. Roehm rejected the idea. ''We must make Germany completely ours, a total SA state!'' he exclaimed to Joseph Goebbels, who was no doubt startled by this demand.[5]

As friction grew between the army and the Brownshirts, Roehm went out of his way to provoke the group he considered the most reactionary of all: the Officers' Corps. General of Artillery Baron Werner von Fritsch, a non-Nazi who had replaced Hammerstein as chief of the Army Command on February 1, 1934, held a meeting of his Wehrkreise commanders at the Bendlerstrasse on February 2, primarily to discuss the relationship between the army and the SA. Blomberg told the generals that Roehm had issued a new memo, which proposed combining the armies of the party and the state, under the command of Roehm himself. In the middle of the meeting, Reichenau interrupted Fritsch to read a telegram from Roehm. ''Henceforth,'' the SA chief announced, ''the conduct of operations, and therefore mobilization, shall be the province of the SA.'' Blomberg, Fritsch, Reichenau, and the Wehrkreise commanders voted unanimously to reject the memo. Fritsch nevertheless invited Roehm to attend the army maneuvers at Bad Liebenstein in Thuringia—largely out of courtesy. Roehm sent one of his sleep-in aides, a notorious homosexual, instead. Fritsch, a straight-laced conservative even by Prussian standards, was livid. Something had to be done about this man Roehm.

In the meantime, President von Hindenburg's health began to deteriorate in the spring of 1934. Hitler's power was neither absolute nor secure as long as the armed forces took their oaths of allegiance to the president, not to Hitler. The question that loomed so large in Germany at this critical time was: ''Who would succeed Hindenburg?'' There were three candidates: Hitler; General Ritter Franz von Epp, a veteran Freikorps leader and a champion of rearmament; and Crown Prince August Wilhelm (''Auwi''), who favored a restoration of the monarchy. Votes, of course, were no longer cast in Germany; the winner of this office would be the one who garnered the support of the army. It was known that Hindenburg favored a restoration of the House of Hohenzollern; how much impact this fact would have on future events was not known in the spring of 1934. It was clear, however, that Hitler had to woo the Reichswehr or face the prospect of never attaining absolute power. He might also have to deal with another army-backed president who might not be as lethargic as Hindenburg.

On April 10, 1934, Adolf Hitler arrived in Kiel and boarded the cruiser *Deutschland*, where he was greeted by Admiral Raeder, General Baron von Fritsch, and the defense minister, Colonel General von Blomberg.[6] The warship sailed the next day, and Hitler was impressed with the smooth precision with which it was run. They sailed through the Grand Baelt, then along the coast passed the Skagen, and then northwest, up the Norwegian coast. Snow was falling that evening when Hitler and von Blomberg retired to the captain's large cabin, where they talked for a long time. No one knows exactly what was

said, but the results are known all too well. In what became known as ''the Pact of the *Deutschland*,'' Hitler agreed to curb the power of Roehm and the SA; in exchange, Blomberg and the Reichswehr agreed to support him for president of the Reich. The exact terms of the deal (including how far Hitler promised to go in curbing the power of the Storm Troopers) were never disclosed.

Meanwhile, Roehm continued to disregard Hitler's orders and to publicly proclaim that the Nazi Revolution must be continued.

The *Deutschland* docked at Wilhelmstrasse on April 14. Six days later, on his 45th birthday, Hitler issued a number of announcements and directives that had a direct bearing on the SA situation. First, Heinrich Himmler officially became chief of the Gestapo. Second, Joachim von Ribbentrop (a friend of Himmler's) was named German ambassador extraordinary on the question of disarmament. He was specifically authorized to use offers to reduce the size of the SA as negotiating points. Finally, it was announced that the entire SA would go on leave during the month of July. During that time, they were forbidden to wear their uniforms, assemble, parade, or take part in any public demonstration.

Roehm—predictably—was furious, but most of the German people were relieved. What sympathy they ever had for the SA had long since disappeared, and the members of the Officers' Corps were not the only Germans who were appalled by their immoral behavior, arrogance, lack of restraint, and perversions, which were so open and widespread that they could not be concealed—not that the leadership of the SA tried that hard to conceal them. It was common knowledge, for example, that SA *Obergruppenfuehrer* (General of SA) Edmund Heines, the police president of Breslau, ran a highly efficient homosexual recruiting ring, which supplied young men and boys from throughout the Reich for Roehm's male harem and for his staff. Karl Ernst, the Obergruppenfuehrer of Berlin, was even more perverted. He liked to seduce the daughters of members of Berlin society, without restriction on age. He also liked to perform unnatural acts with young boys—the younger and more unwilling, the better. To finance their exotic orgies and luxurious lifestyles, the Brownshirt leadership took most of the Winter Relief (*Winterhilfe*) funds. Winter Relief was originally established by the National Socialist People's Welfare Organization (a branch of the NSDAP) to provide help for the unemployed. All party organizations were expected to assist in collecting contributions, which initially had been voluntary. Now, however, the SA was virtually extorting funds. Brownshirts were collecting funds at places of work and seemed to on every street corner. Other groups went door-to-door. Refusal to give, or a lack of generosity, often evolved threats, curses, and occasionally beatings from the ''charity workers.''

It should have been obvious to Roehm that his enemies were gradually encircling him. The Reichswehr, led by Blomberg and the much tougher Fritsch, hated and despised him. The conservatives, including the Junkers, most of the aristocrats, and the large industrialists felt the same way, and had protested to Hindenburg about the arbitrary arrests, the general terrorism, and the arrogance of the Brownshirts. Hermann Goering (Hitler's chief deputy and once chief of the SA himself) publicly sided with the conservatives and the Officers' Corps against Roehm.

Hitler had a difficult time bringing himself to act against his former comrade, but—after Hindenburg and Blomberg made it clear that he must act to stay in power—act he did. From June 30 to July 2, 1934, he purged the SA. Among the executed included SA Obergruppenfuehrers Ritter von Krausser, Peter Heydebreck, Edmund Heines, August Schneidhuber (the police president of Munich), and Hans Hayn; SA Lieutenant Generals Georg von Detten, Edmund Schmidt, and Hans Joachim von Falkenhausen; SA Colonel Julius Uhl (the chief of Roehm's staff guard); SA Colonel Hans Joachim von Spreti-Weilbach (Roehm's ''boyfriend''); and many others. Roehm himself was shot in his prison cell on July 1 by SS Lieutenant General Theodor Eicke, the merciless commandant of the Dachau concentration camp. In Berlin, most of the executions took place on the grounds of the former Cadet Academy of Gross Lichterfelde, where the shots from the firing squads rang out about every 20 minutes from afternoon to midnight. At least 150 people were executed at Gross Lichterfelde alone. Other executions took place the Stadelheim in Munich and in the Colombia House, a Gestapo prison and torture chamber in Berlin. Other victims were simply shot on the spot. Working in teams of two or three, and occasionally more (if the victim was particularly important), the murder squads would knock on doors, identify their prey, and open fire without explanation. Then they would simply walk away, leaving the body for whoever happened to find it. Even today it is not known how many people were killed in the Night of the Long Knives. Estimates vary from 87 to several hundred, but a more precise estimate is not possible.

The most prominent victim of the Night of the Long Knives was former chancellor Kurt von Schleicher, who was also a former lieutenant general in the Reichsheer. Five men in a black car pulled up to his villa in Potsdam, knocked on his door, and demanded admittance. The governess, Maria Guentel, hesitantly opened the door halfway. The men pushed her aside and headed straight for Schleicher's study, where they found him on the telephone. One of them asked him if he was General von Schleicher. When the surprised victim said he was, they drew their pistols and shot the master intriguer seven times, killing

him instantly. Elisabeth von Schleicher, his wife of 18 months, rushed into the room and started screaming, so they shot her as well. Maria Guentel, the only witness, cringed on the floor in terror, but the Gestapo murder squad simply walked out and drove off, hardly sparing her a second glance. She died within a year, however, an apparent suicide.

Schleicher's death, ordered by Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, came as a nasty shock to Hermann Goering. The murder itself did not bother him, but killing a general did—even a discredited one like Schleicher. What if the Reichswehr intervened? This problem was handled by Walter von Reichenau, who issued a press release from the defense ministry, stating that Schleicher had been engaged in treasonable negotiations with a foreign power and that he had resisted when the police came to arrest him. (Reichenau apparently had no trouble calling the Gestapo ''police.'') Frau von Schleicher had run into the crossfire, the dispatch said, and had been killed by accident. Major General Kurt von Brelow, former chief of the Ministerial Office of the Reichswehr, was also gunned down. His body was found in the doorway of his home.

Hitler ordered the killing stopped at 4 A.M. on Monday, July 2. That day the newspapers published a telegram from the gravely ill President Paul von Hindenburg, congratulating Hitler on his actions. The telegram was, in fact, written and sent by Otto von Meissner, secretary of state to the president.[7] It is extremely doubtful that Hindenburg ever saw it. For this service, among others, Meissner was retained as state secretary and chief of the Reichschancellery until the end of the Nazi regime.

On July 3, the Reich cabinet met and retroactively legalized all of Hitler's actions in the Night of the Long Knives. In accordance with the Pact of the *Deutschland*, General von Blomberg extended the gratitude of the cabinet and the armed forces to the Fuehrer. He even went so far as to praise Hitler for his ''exemplary courage.'' Ten days later, Hitler addressed the Reichstag at the Kroll Opera House, where he justified his actions. The German parliament, now a rubber stamp for Fuehrer, applauded loudly at every appropriate opportunity.

In the Reichswehr, only retired Field Marshal von Mackensen and retired General von Hammerstein demanded an investigation into the deaths of Schleicher and Brelow. The army's turn to fulfill its part of the Pact of the *Deutschland* came at 9 A.M. on August 2, when 87-year-old Paul von Hindenburg passed away at his estate of Neudeck. Three hours later, the Chancellery announced that the cabinet had enacted a law the preceding day, combining the offices of president and chancellor, and that Adolf Hitler was now head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The title ''president'' was abolished; Hitler

now styled himself ''Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor.'' That afternoon, the members of the armed forces began swearing a new oath of allegiance. Written by Walter von Reichenau, it read: ''I swear by God this sacred oath that I will render unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler, the Fuehrer of the German nation and people, and supreme commander of the armed forces, and as a brave soldier will be ready to risk my life at any time for this oath.''

To the Prussian Officers' Corps, an oath was almost a physical thing and to break one was, for most of them, unthinkable. When the soldiers swore this oath, Adolf Hitler achieved his goal: he had obtained absolute power and was dictator of Germany.

NOTES

1. John Toland, *Adolf Hitler* (1976; reprint ed., 1977), p. 403 (hereafter cited as Toland, *Hitler*).

2. Walter Goerlitz, *The German General Staff, 1657–1945* (1953; reprint ed., 1957) (hereafter cited as Goerlitz, *General Staff*).

3. ''Field grade'' officers are majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels. Those below (second lieutenants, first lieutenants, and captains) are ''company grade'' officers, while those above are called general officers or generals. This includes the rank of field marshal.

4. John Wheeler-Bennett, *Knaves, Fools and Heroes* (1974), p. 80.

5. Max Gallo, *The Night of the Long Knives*, Lily Emmet, trans. (1972; reprint ed., 1973), p. 65.

6. Hitler promoted Blomberg to colonel general on August 30, 1933.

7. Otto Meissner was born in Bischweile (now Bischwiller), Alsace, in 1880, the son of a postal official. He studied law in Strasbourg and Berlin, where he received his doctorate in law in 1908. He then worked for the *Reichsbahn* (the national railway). He served in an infantry regiment (mostly behind the front) in Russia and the Balkans and was a German business agent for the Ukranian government in 1919. Later that year, he became an advisor to socialist President Ebert. He became a ministerial director in the office of the president in 1920 and was promoted to state secretary in 1923. A political survivor, he held the same post under Ebert, Hindenburg, and Hitler. In 1937, he became chief of the Presidential Chancellery of the Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor, a post that carried cabinet rank but was largely ceremonial. He had little power or influence.

Meissner was arrested after the war and was tried as a minor war criminal but was acquitted in 1949. He died in Munich in 1953.

CHAPTER III

THE SECRET REARMAMENT

REARMAMENT AND DIPLOMATIC MANEUVERING

Hitler left the details of the clandestine rebuilding of the German Army almost exclusively to the defense minister, General von Blomberg, and his top subordinates: General of Artillery Baron Werner von Fritsch,[1] the commander-in-chief of the Army; Ludwig Beck, the chief of the General Staff of the Army; and the seven Wehrkreise commanders. They, in turn, based their planning on the so-called Conversion Plan or A-Plan, which had been drafted by the Reichswehr in early 1932, on the orders of General Groener, who was then defense minister and minister of the interior. Its ultimate goal was to create a 21-division field army with a mobilized strength of 300,000 men by 1938. Its goals for 1933 were relatively modest. The size restrictions on existing units were to be relaxed, and a few new signal, artillery, and anti-aircraft artillery units were to be formed. The effects of these measures would increase the size of the army by 14,000 men. In addition, new volunteers would be enlisted for only three years, instead of the 12 years required by the Treaty of Versailles. This move was the first step in creating a 85,000 man reserve. The plan also called for the creation of nine new border defense units in 1933. These were to be trained by the army for infantry combat in a series of short courses. Finally, the training of existing border units was to be intensified.[2]

The rise of the Nazis initially did little to effect this modern program, except to increase the number of enlistments for 1933 by more than half, increase the military budget, and provide for the training of selected SA units. Even this program, however, entailed considerable risk for Nazi Germany, which was surrounded by hostile and suspicious neighbors, whose intelligence services immediately recognized

that something was afoot. In fact, as early as March 1933, Marshal Jozef Pilsudski, the Polish dictator, suggested to the French that they wage a preventive war against Nazi Germany. His suggestion, however, was emphatically rejected.

On February 3, 1933, Adolf Hitler said that if France possessed ''statesmen,'' they would regard German rearmament as a provocation and would immediately launch a preemptive attack against the Reich (exactly as Pilsudski would soon suggest). Until rearmament could be completed, he went on to say, the objective of German foreign policy was to prevent the economic and diplomatic isolation of the Third Reich, as well as to forestall Allied military action, until Germany was militarily prepared to deal with them. Hitler took every opportunity to express his peaceful intentions to the world and, thanks largely to his propaganda minister, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, he ''was distinctly successful in his efforts to convince people at home and abroad that National Socialist policies had peaceful intentions.''[3]

German rearmament now entered its most dangerous phase, because (as Hitler himself pointed out) a preventive strike by the French at this critical juncture would result in the destruction of the Reichswehr and in Germany's being overwhelmed and overrun. Hitler continued to play his double game of engaging in clandestine military expansion while loudly proclaiming his peaceful intentions throughout the winter of 1933–34. His next surprise move came on November 15, when it was announced that Poland had begun serious direct negotiations with Berlin on a number of issues. This alone was a significant diplomatic success for Hitler, for one of the greatest fears in the minds of the officers of the General Staff was a two-front war, which had been the major cause of the defeat of the Imperial Army in 1914–18. Because Poland was France's major ally in the East, any reasonable German agreement with Warsaw would be a major victory for Nazi diplomacy. Additionally, an agreement with Poland would further enhance Hitler's newfound image as a peace-loving leader and would weaken the ''collective security'' concept on which the League of Nations had been founded. In fact, one could argue that these negotiations were part of the program of ''divide and conquer'' that Hitler was pursuing in international affairs, just as he was simultaneously practicing ''divide and rule'' in domestic affairs.

The German-Polish negotiations culminated on January 26, 1934, when the two countries signed a 10-year non-aggression pact. Warsaw never even consulted France before ratifying the treaty. The agreement set off a flurry of anti-Nazi diplomatic activity across Europe. The risks involved in German rearmament had obviously become more acute, so the following month Hitler reversed his previous position and ordered the establishment of the 300,000-man army by October. This was too radical a speed-up for the generals, who succeeded in getting the target

date pushed back to 1935. Hitler's order nevertheless represented an unprecedented acceleration of the rearmaments program. Wilhelm Deist wrote later, ''from this point on one is no longer justified in speaking of a well-planned, long-term programme of armaments.''[4] Indeed, no matter how necessary haste might have seemed at the time, the Reichswehr exhibited the symptoms of a force that had grown too rapidly for the rest of its existence.

Meanwhile, General Baron von Fritsch and his Wehrkreise commanders began to implement the Conversion Plan, which involved the creation of 21 new infantry divisions. The cadres for these new units would be supplied by the previously existing seven infantry divisions. In the initial phase, 21 new infantry regiments (numbered 22 to 42) were formed simply by assigning the third battalion and the replacement-training battalion of each existing regiment to the new regiments. For example, the III Battalion of the 1st Infantry Regiment (III/1st Infantry) provided the cadre for the new 22nd Infantry Regiment, the III/2nd Infantry was assigned to the 23rd Infantry Regiment, and so forth. Each of these 42 infantry regiments then used newly inducted volunteers and cadres of officers and NCOs from their first and second battalions to reestablish their third battalion and their training units, and sometimes a fourth battalion as well. In this manner, the German Army had 165 infantry battalions by the end of 1935.

Fourteen new artillery regiments were formed in a similar manner. In 1932, the Reichsheer artillery regiments had three battalions each, and each battalion had three batteries of four guns each, or a total of 36 guns per regiment. When the 21-division expansion began in 1934, each of the seven existing artillery regiments surrendered two of its battalions to two new divisions, and each battalion became the cadre for a new artillery regiment. The new regiments bore the same number as their division (the 10th Artillery Regiment was part of the 10th Infantry Division, for example). The 1934 artillery regiments formed a new internal organization of four battalions, each of which had two batteries of three guns each. The 1934 divisions had, therefore, an artillery strength of 24 guns, as opposed to 36 guns in the 1932 type divisions. But there was plenty of room for further expansion.

At the same time these divisions were forming, a cavalry corps headquarters was formed and the squadrons of the 3rd Cavalry Division at Weimar were converted into the Light Division (*Liechte Division*), which eventually would become the first of the famous panzer divisions. Elements of the 2nd Cavalry Division's headquarters (still under General von Kleist) were converted into Headquarters, Wehrkreis VIII (and VIII Corps) at Breslau, under the code name Army Service Depot Breslau, while the headquarters of the defunct 3rd Cavalry Division was divided. Part was used to form the headquarters of the

cavalry corps, and part went to Kassel as Army Service Depot Kassel, the code name for the headquarters of the new Wehrkreis IX, which would become IX Corps upon mobilization. It was commanded by a pro-Nazi lieutenant general named Friedrich Dollmann. Table 3.1 shows the details of this plan, as well as the code name under which each division operated until October 15, 1935.

THE BUILDING OF THE LUFTWAFFE

The buildup of the German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*) was even more difficult than that of the army, because it had to be accomplished largely

Table 3.1
The German Army Divisions, October 1934

Division	Location (Wehrkreis)	Code Name
1st Infantry	Koenigsberg (I)[a]	Artillery Command I
2nd Infantry	Stettin (II)	Artillery Command II
3rd Infantry	Frankfurt/Oder (III)	Commandant of Frankfurt/Oder
4th Infantry	Dresden (IV)	Artillery Command IV
5th Infantry	Ulm (V)	Commandant of Ulm
6th Infantry	Bielefeld (VI)	Infantry Command VI
7th Infantry	Munich (VII)	Artillery Command VII
8th Infantry	Oppeln (VIII)	Artillery Command VIII
9th Infantry	Giessen (IX)	Infantry Command V
10th Infantry	Regensberg (VII)	Commandant of Regensberg
11th Infantry	Allenstein (I)	Infantry Command I
12th Infantry	Schwerin (II)	Infantry Command II
13th Infantry	Magdeburg (III)	Infantry Command IV
14th Infantry	Leipzig (IV)	Commandant of Leipzig
15th Infantry	Wuerzburg (V)	Artillery Command V
16th Infantry	Muenster (VI)	Commandant of Muenster
17th Infantry	Nuremberg (VII)	Infantry Command VII
18th Infantry	Liegnitz (VIII)	Infantry Command III
19th Infantry	Hanover (IX)	Artillery Command VI
20th Infantry	Hamburg (II)	Reichswehr Service Depot Hamburg
21st Infantry	Elbing (I)	Commandant of Elbing
1st Cavalry	Potsdam (Cav Corps)	1st Cavalry Division
2nd Cavalry	Breslau (Cav Corps)	2nd Cavalry Division
Light Div.[b]	Weimar	3rd Cavalry Division

Notes:
[a]Moved to Insterburg on February 3, 1936.
[b]Later redesignated 1st Panzer Division. The original Headquarters, 3rd Cavalry Division became HQ, Wehrkreis VIII in 1934 and remained in Breslau.
Source:
Georg Tessin, *Formationgeschichte der Wehrmacht, 1933-1939* (1974), pp. 21–22.

from scratch, and many more technological difficulties had to be overcome, because the Luftwaffe was by its very nature a more technologically oriented service. It was also the branch of the service that was, more than any other, both the product and victim of its leaders.

The supreme commander of the Luftwaffe was, of course, Hermann Goering, the Fuehrer's deputy and designated successor. Goering, however, was more interested in enjoying his power and acquiring new offices than in working in the ones he had. In addition, he was almost totally unqualified for the post, because he had never commanded any unit higher than a wing, had no engineering or technical training or background, was totally without corporate management experience, had little grounding in history and none in economics, lacked tactical and strategic comprehension, and had no General Staff training. The real power in the development and evolution of the Luftwaffe, therefore, would necessarily devolve on his deputy, and his job would be made doubly tough by the fact that it would have to be accomplished clandestinely, because Germany was still forbidden to have an air force under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

Goering's choice for state secretary for aviation (with equal rank in the Reich air ministry) was Erhard Milch. Erhard Milch was born in Wilhelmshaven in 1892, the son of Anton Milch, a chief staff pharmacist in the Imperial Navy and a man of the Jewish faith. Anton and his wife separated in the 1900s, and Frau Milch returned to her native Berlin with her children, where she saw to it that Erhard received a good education. He joined the 1st Foot Artillery Regiment at Koenigsberg in 1910 and was commissioned second lieutenant in 1911. When World War I broke out in 1914, Milch was sent to the Eastern Front as the adjutant of an artillery battalion. He soon transferred to the Imperial Flying Service and spent most of the war working as an aerial observer and as commander of an aerial reconnaissance squadron on the Western Front. After the war, he was not selected for retention in the Reichswehr.

Nothing indicates that, before November 1918, Erhard Milch was anything but a loyal, courageous, and patriotic officer. Following his discharge from the army in January 1920, however, he was a changed man. Idealism was dead in him now; after the collapse of the Second Reich, Milch was motivated almost entirely by his lust for power and his own ruthless ambition.

After briefly serving in an air police (Freikorps) unit in East Prussia in 1920, Milch went into the civil aviation business. Through ruthless corporate maneuvering, he became the chief executive officer of Deutsche Lufthansa, Ltd., the German national airlines, in 1926.

Milch took no notice of the Nazis until they scored major gains in the 1930 election; then he deliberately set out to cultivate them,

perhaps as an insurance policy. In any case, by 1932, he was paying sizable bribes to Reichstag President Hermann Goering and was furnishing Hitler with Lufthansa airplanes for his campaign flights, free of charge. When he exhibited reluctance to join the government in early 1933, Adolf Hitler personally urged him to accept the post. Later, the Fuehrer himself presented Milch with the Golden Party Badge.

Although Hermann Goering did not care personally (he was one of the least anti-Semitic of the Nazi leaders), he knew that Milch's Jewish ancestry might cause difficulties for both of them later on. He solved the problem by conducting a bogus investigation of Milch's racial background. The investigation ''revealed'' that Frau Milch, a full-blooded ''Aryan,'' had carried on an adulterous affair with Baron Hermann von Bier, another Aryan, for years. Her husband was aware of this but accepted the situation as a pre-condition to marriage. Furthermore, Frau Milch never engaged in sexual relations with her husband because one of his relatives was insane, and she thought it might be hereditary. According to the so-called investigation, Anton Milch accepted this as well. The entire story is so thin that it is amusing; nevertheless, Milch's birth certificate was reissued with von Bier listed as the father, and Goering ordered that Milch's racial background file be sealed, never to be reopened. Even so, whispers about Milch's ancestry continued until the end of the Third Reich.

When Erhard Milch became state secretary for aviation, the German aircraft industry employed only 4,000 people in manufacturing (working in eight airframe and five engine manufacturing plants), produced but 31 airplanes a month, and was far behind the Western Allies in engineering know-how and technology. It was not short of funds, however, and, by the end of 1933, some 20,000 people were engaged in manufacturing German airplanes. Milch asked Dr. Robert Knauss, the traffic manager of Lufthansa and the future commanding general of the Air War Academy, to work out the first plan for the new air force. Knauss was a believer in the theories of Italian General Emilio Douhet, a World War airman who believed that wars could be won by air power alone. Knauss's memorandum, ''Die deutsche Luftflotte,'' was the first strategic plan for the new Luftwaffe. He argued that a strong air fleet would be the most effective weapon for securing Germany's rearmament during its vulnerable period, because an effective air weapon would deter foreign intervention until the Reichswehr as a whole was fully developed. He therefore called for an air fleet of 400 four-engine bombers, each capable of carrying a 2,000-kilogram (4,409-pound) bomb load, including high explosive, incendiary, and poison gas bombs. In the event of war, this force would be used against vital centers of production and transportation, as well as against the populations of large cities. Knauss pointed out that such a bomber force

would cost about the same as constructing two battleships, or raising and outfitting five infantry divisions, and would effectively secure Germany from interference from France, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. On the negative side, he said, this move might trouble Anglo-German relations. Knauss called his proposed bomber force the *Risikoluftwaffe* (the Risk Air Force).[5]

In mid-June 1933, after studying Knauss's recommendations, Milch revealed his plan for a ''risk air fleet'' of 600 frontline (that is, combat) airplanes (including nine bomber groups) by late 1935. Meanwhile, the nucleus of the Luftwaffe grew rapidly. David Irving called Werner von Blomberg ''an officer of considerable vision,'' and certainly this was true, insofar as the air force was concerned. Blomberg transferred his entire air operations staff to the air ministry as soon as it was formally established on May 15, 1933.[6] That year alone, he transferred 550 officers with air service experience to the Luftwaffe, along with 5,500 junior officers and NCO volunteers. In August, Milch ordered the establishment of 12 specialized air training schools for fighter pilots, observers, mechanics, bombardiers, aerial gunners, and technical specialists. Meanwhile, civilian dressed Luftwaffe officers from the traffic inspectorate of the air ministry organized the state airline for war, teaching Lufthansa pilots and crewmen air tactics under the guise of navigational training. Elsewhere, hundreds of construction workers were engaged in building Luftwaffe barracks and other facilities, while shipping, railway locomotive, and railroad car factories were converted to the manufacture of aircraft and aircraft components. By April 1934, the Luftwaffe had grown large enough to create the 1st Air Division, which was headquartered in Berlin. It was commanded by Colonel Hugo Sperrle, a huge bear of a man, who simultaneously served as commander of Army Aviation until the services were formally separated the following year.

THE NAVAL BUILDUP BEGINS

Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, the German fleet was limited to six battleships of the pre-Dreadnought era, six cruisers, 12 destroyers, and 12 torpedo boats. To man these ships and boats, the navy was allowed 15,000 men, of which 1,100 could be officers. In addition, Germany was allowed a reserve of two battleships, two cruisers, four destroyers, and four torpedo boats, which could neither be manned nor armed.

The German Navy was largely neglected during the era of the Weimar Republic. For example, General Groener, the defense minister from 1928 until 1932, believed that the primary missions of the German Navy were to protect German sea lanes in the Baltic Sea and to

safeguard the sea link between the Reich and the separated province of East Prussia. The naval leadership did not agree, but they could do nothing about it, except to raise an occasional useless protest. Duelffer wrote later: ''One can speak of naval-industrial complex from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s only in the sense that the navy leaders sought to advance their goals by arguing that their programmes would create jobs in depressed industries.''[7]

When Hitler took power in 1933, the navy did not even have the hardware permitted by the treaty. There was no indication, however, that Adolf Hitler intended to do any better vis-à-vis the navy. He did not try to hide the fact that he did not understand naval affairs or naval warfare and was frankly concerned that a significant German naval buildup would impede or complicate his diplomatic efforts to win over the British.

Admiral Erich Raeder, the commander-in-chief of the German Navy, wanted to significantly expand the naval forces, especially the surface fleet, but he was initially restrained by the influence of Defense Minister von Blomberg, who wanted only a limited naval expansion. Gradually, however, Raeder was able to establish a personal relationship with Adolf Hitler, and, although he may not have won over the Fuehrer to the navy's cause, he seems to have at least been able to convince him of the usefulness of the navy as a political and diplomatic instrument. Thus, he was able to bypass the defense minister and obtain considerable changes in the shipbuilding program from the Fuehrer himself. This is certainly reflected in the increase in naval expenditures from 1932 through 1939, as Table 3.2 shows. In February 1934, the German fleet consisted of one pocket battleship (the *Deutschland*), five light cruisers (the *Emden*, *Koenigsberg*, *Karlsruhe*, *Koeln*, and *Leipzig*), 12 torpedo

Table 3.2
German Naval Budgets, 1932–39
(in million Reichsmarks)

1932	187.4
1933	311.8
1934	496.5
1935	695.1
1936	1,160.7
1937	1,478.5
1938	1,756.3
1939	2,389.9

Source:
Wilhelm Deist, *The Wehrmacht and German Rearmament (1980)*, p. 81.

boats, eight minesweepers, and eight small torpedo boats, plus a few training and support vessels. All had been built since World War I.

The following month, the navy secretly issued the Replacement Shipbuilding Program of 1934. It was, Raeder wrote, designed to ''disregard international ties in order that exclusively German interests could be served.'' He proposed to build eight battleships, three aircraft carriers, 18 cruisers, 48 destroyers, and 72 submarines by 1949.[8]

As a result of this decision, the entire German naval construction program was based on three incorrect assumptions: first, that the navy would have until 1949 to prepare for war; second, that the navy would be allocated the industrial resources and labor necessary to construct such a fleet; and, third, that the enemy would be the French but not the British.

Much more so than is the case with armies and air forces, navies must be constructed with an eye toward future opponents. It never seems to have occurred to Hitler nor Raeder that the fact that they did not want a war with Great Britain did not necessarily mean there would not be a war with Great Britain. It did not seem to occur to them (until it was too late) that Britain might declare war on Germany in 1939, exactly as it had in 1914. Raeder, a ''big ship'' man, was building a ''big ship'' fleet, while neglecting the submarine branch. Simply put, the German Navy was building a fleet designed to fight the wrong kind of war. Since a tremendous amount of time is required to construct a fleet, such mistakes take a great deal of time to rectify. In World War II, it would prove to be impossible for the German Navy to redeem the mistakes their planners made in 1934 and those their political leader made in 1938 and 1939.

MILITARY EXPANSION AND NAZISM

The expansion of the armed forces brought mixed blessings, as far as most of the German generals were concerned. They were certainly gratified by the increasing size of the army, which brought them promotions and larger commands, but they were concerned with the creeping political indoctrination taking place in the ranks. This process was being facilitated and encouraged by two highly placed men in the defense ministry: the hopelessly idealistic romantic, Werner von Blomberg, who looked on National Socialism as some sort of reincarnation of Imperial Germany; and his much more cynical and opportunistic assistant, Walter von Reichenau, who was using Hitler and Nazism to advance his own career. Although their motives were completely different, Blomberg and Reichenau certainly made an effective team, as far as Adolf Hitler was concerned. As early as March 1933, Blomberg demanded that his military commanders give ''unquestioning support''

to the ''national revolution.''[9] Two months later, on May 15, he ordered the Reichswehr to salute all members of the *National Verbaende* and their colors. (The term *National Verbaende* referred to all armed formations of the Nazi Party, including the SA, the SS, the National Socialist Motor Corps [NSKK], and the Hitler Youth.) He also ordered all soldiers to avoid appearing indifferent to the National Movement. Indoors, with or without a hat, they were to give the national (that is, Hitler) salute when others were doing so, and they were ordered to join in the singing as well. In August, Blomberg went one step further: he reached an agreement with the NSDAP that established the National Verbaende as the main source of future Reichswehr recruits, thus further weakening the army relative to the Nazi Party.

Other pro-Nazi orders emanated from the *Tirpitzufer* (the defense ministry building) with great regularity. On September 19, Blomberg decreed that all soldiers in plain clothes were to use the Nazi salute when meeting members of the SA. This order was emphasized by a directive dated October 4, apparently because Blomberg did not feel it was being obeyed strictly enough. Blomberg further instructed local commanders to honor any Storm Trooper ban against Jewish shops (December 8, 1933) and later forbade servicemen from patronizing Jewish-owned stores altogether (July 15, 1935). On December 11, 1933, the defense minister ordered that all Jews were to be retired (or discharged) from the services and that no more non-Aryans were to be allowed to enlist. The order was softer than most anti-Jewish decrees because Jewish war veterans were not subject to its exclusionary clauses, and the army (rather than the NSDAP) was to determine who was or was not a Jew; only about 50 people were affected, but it was a distinctly anti-Semitic order nevertheless.

Blomberg's most visible pro-Nazi order was issued on February 25, 1934, when he commanded all servicemen to wear the *Wehrmachtsadler*, the armed forces' eagle, on the right breast of their tunics. This emblem consisted of an upright eagle clutching a swastika in its claws. The symbol of the Nazi Party thus became part of the everyday apparel of every serviceman in Germany. (The *Waffen-SS* [armed SS] adopted the same emblem, but wore it on their left sleeve; the Luftwaffe adopted a flying eagle carrying a swastika in its claws as its emblem, but, like the army, its men wore it on their right breast.)

Other defense ministry orders dictated that the services hold National Socialist political doctrine classes twice a week (April 4, 1934); that special courses of Nazi political instruction and training be given at all officer training schools, staff colleges, and in the War Academy (January 30, 1936); and that all commanding officers accept the Nazi worldview, and that only men who publicly endorsed National Socialism were to be commissioned in the future (July 1935). On April 1,

1936, all soldiers were prohibited from marrying Jews, and even if only one of the prospective bride's parents was Jewish, the marriage was to be forbidden. In July 1936, Blomberg ordered that all politically unreliable officers be reported to the Gestapo. Other Blomberg orders restricted the prerogatives of the military chaplains, made attendance of the Barracks Evening Hour (a religious service) optional, made it easier for the Nazis to distribute their propaganda literature to the lower, less cultivated ranks, instructed soldiers to treat SS men as comrades, and suspended that very old regulation forbidding soldiers from joining the organizations of political parties. Since the NSDAP was the only legal political party in Germany at this time, this order was tantamount to giving soldiers permission to join Nazi Party organizations.

Not all senior German officers thought like Werner von Blomberg, however; by 1934, two different types of personalities had emerged in the high command: pro-Nazis like Blomberg and Reichenau, and non-Nazis, like Baron von Fritsch and his chief of staff, Ludwig Beck, who were concerned about expanding the army and increasing its efficiency independent of the Nazi ideology.

Fritsch and Beck did what they could to protect non-Nazi (and even some anti-Nazi) officers from Blomberg and Reichenau, who were functioning as Hitler's agents for the armed forces. In early 1934, for example, when the defense ministry issued its first racial restrictions order, Colonel Erich von Manstein (the chief of the Operations Branch of the General Staff of the Army) wrote a remarkable letter to Reichenau, stating that it was an act of cowardice for the defense ministry to surrender to the Nazi Party and to discriminate against Jewish soldiers, who had proven by their enlistments that they were prepared to die for the Fatherland. Furious, Reichenau showed the memo to Blomberg, who Manstein had, in effect, called a coward. Blomberg telephoned Fritsch and demanded that Manstein be punished. Fritsch, a pure-blooded Prussian of the old school, did not particularly like Blomberg and certainly did not like him meddling in the affairs of his command. He curtly told Blomberg that disciplinary matters within the army were none of the defense minister's business; then he hung up. Nothing was done to Manstein.

Fritsch and Beck were less successful in protecting naval Captain Conrad Patzig, the chief of the *Abwehr* (the intelligence service of the armed forces) since mid-1932. He was relieved of his duties on January 2, 1935, and was replaced by the enigmatic Wilhelm Canaris, who was much more acceptable to the Nazis and who was willing to allow his old friend Reinhard Heydrich (now Himmler's deputy) to extend his tentacles into what had previously been a strictly military domain. Canaris would come to regret this action later on.

Although Werner von Blomberg seemed perfectly willing to aid in the introduction of Nazi ideology and racial intolerance into the armed

forces, he was not prepared to allow party organizations to compete with the army as the ''sole bearer of arms'' for the nation. We have seen the part he played in suppressing the SA and eliminating Roehm as a threat to the army. No sooner than the SA had been dealt with, however, than a new threat arose: Heinrich Himmler and his SS.

From January 1, 1932, until the end of 1935, the number of SS officers increased from 350 to 6,268.[10] The SS *Verfuegungstruppe* (special duty troops or SS-VT), the most important precursor of the *Waffen-SS* (armed SS), was formed by the regional SS commanders in 1933, under the name *Politische Bereitschaften* (political ready reserve). It was thus decentralized and organized independently of the state.[11] Two other SS units formed independently of the SS-VT: the first, the *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler*—the Fuehrer's personal bodyguard unit—was founded on March 17, 1933, at the Empress Augusta-Victoria Barracks in Berlin-Kreuzberg. Under the command of SS Lieutenant General ''Sepp'' Dietrich, it initially consisted of 117 men, but it later grew into an SS panzer division with a strength of more than 20,000 men. To belong to this unit at the time of its formation, a man had to be under 25 years of age, be in excellent physical condition, be at least 1.8 meters tall, have no criminal record, be a fanatical Nazi, and have joined the SS before January 30, 1933.[12]

The second, the notorious SS Death's Head units (*Totenkopfverbaende* or SS-TV), were formed at the various SS concentration camp guard units, but they were not centralized under a single inspectorate until July 5, 1934, when SS Major General Theodor Eicke was named inspector of concentration camps and SS guard units. Six days later, Eicke was promoted to SS lieutenant general as a reward for murdering Ernst Roehm. By March 1935, these units had been organized into six Death's Head battalions, which spent more time engaged in military maneuvers than in guarding inmates.

By autumn 1935, the total strength of the SS was more than 200,000 men, but the SS-VT units had a strength of only about 5,000, and the Death's Head units had another 2,000.[13] Blomberg objected to even this, and the first friction developed between the Army and the SS. The Fuehrer sided with Blomberg. He wanted an efficient, professional army, not a political army of fanatical but ill-trained amateurs. Himmler, therefore, was forced to reach an agreement with Blomberg. Under a defense ministry directive issued on September 24, 1934, and agreed to by Himmler, the political nature of the SS was emphasized; the SS-VT was authorized to expand to a strength of three regiments and several smaller units, but it could not form a division or a divisional headquarters without the consent of the defense minister. The SS-VT was to be placed under the command of the armed forces in the event of war, and the armed forces would be responsible for its combat

training in time of peace. Finally, the SS-VT was not allowed to form artillery units.

Blomberg was pleased with this compromise, for it gave him three new regiments without having to bare any expense for forming or maintaining them. Also, the SS was limited to regimental size units, and, without artillery, forming an effective combat division was out of the question, even if they violated their agreement. Himmler, who wanted an SS division and an expanded armed SS, was naturally disappointed but did not make a major issue of his reversal. He would bide his time; he knew how to wait.

HITLER RENOUNCES THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

Adolf Hitler, on the other hand, was tired of waiting. The size and scope of his secret rearmament was too large to keep secret indefinitely, and the Allies already knew something was afoot (in fact, they already knew more than Hitler suspected). Also, Hitler was anxious to publicly repudiate the hated Treaty of Versailles. Then, on March 4, 1935, the British government announced that it was increasing the size of its defense forces because Germany was rearming on a large scale. The proverbial cat was out of the bag. On Saturday, March 9 (most of Hitler's surprises were sprung on Saturdays), the German government announced that the Luftwaffe already existed, and the Nazi propaganda machine said it would put a ''steel roof over Germany'' and would ''darken the sun.''[14] This was pure bluff, as we have seen, but it brought none of the expected howls of protest. British Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon did not even cancel his planned visit to Berlin.

The Luftwaffe announcement was just a trial balloon for Hitler's next Saturday surprise. The French government provided the pretext on March 12, when it extended the period of compulsory military service from 18 to 24 months and lowered the age of enlistment to make up for the shortage of young men caused by the war of 1914–18. Hitler seized on this act, and, on Saturday, March 16, Goebbels read Hitler's ''Proclamation of Military Sovereignty'' to a shocked group of foreign correspondents. In it, Germany repudiated the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles and reintroduced general conscription, with a one-year period of service, beginning October 1, 1935. In the decree, Hitler spontaneously announced that the German peacetime army would consist of 36 divisions, organized into 12 corps—a total of 550,000 men. (This annoyed General von Fritsch, who apparently received the news concerning the 36-division army at the same time as the general public. He and Hitler had agreed on a peacetime army of 21 divisions [about 300,000 men].) Hypocritically, Hitler added that he had been driven to this step, reluctantly, because of the war-like actions of his neighbors.

Hitler's move took everyone by surprise, even the German generals. Erich von Manstein and Erwin von Witzleben, the commander of Wehrkreis III (the Berlin military district), learned about it from the public radio.

The following day, Sunday, March 17, was Heroes' Memorial Day (*Heldengedenktag*) in Germany. It was also a day of general celebration and jubilation. Most of the German people were genuinely delighted that the shackles of the hated treaty had been thrown off at last, and that day the Fuehrer was a hero to his *volk*. A dazzling military ceremony was staged at the Kroll Opera House, in which the rebuilding of the German Army was acclaimed by all. Hitler sat beside August von Mackensen, the last living field marshal, and then held a military review, in which the blue uniforms of the Luftwaffe were seen publicly for the first time. Finally, he returned to the Chancellery, to await the expected protests, which were even weaker than Hitler had anticipated. The British condemned the action, but, in the same diplomatic note, asked Hitler if he were prepared to receive Foreign Secretary Simon later that month. The French took their protest to the League of Nations on April 9—an equally empty gesture. In the end, the Council of the League expressed its official displeasure at Hitler's action. The British, French, and Italians met at Stresa from April 11 to 14, and again officially condemned Hitler's action and reiterated their support for Austria's independence and for the collective security concept expressed in the Locarno Treaty. (The Stresa Front was a loose alliance between the France, the United Kingdom, and Italy. It guaranteed the independence of Austria and was clearly aimed at checking Germany.) No one, however, actually did a single thing. The League did not even institute sanctions, much less consider military action. Hitler had taken another gamble—and won again. It would not be the last time he gambled, nor the last time he won.

NOTES

1. Baron von Fritsch, an artillery officer, had commanded the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Divisions and Wehrkreis III before becoming chief of the General Staff in February 1934. He became commander-in-chief of the army on May 2, 1935.
2. Wilhelm Deist, *The Wehrmacht and German Rearmament* (1980), p. 28 (hereafter cited as Deist, *Rearmament*).
3. Ibid., pp. 106–7.
4. Ibid., p. 36.
5. Matthew Cooper, *The German Air Force* (1978), p. 35 (hereafter cited as Cooper, *GAF*); Manfred Messerschmidt, ''German Military Effectiveness Between 1919 and 1939,'' in Alan R. Millet and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness*, vol. 2, *The Interwar Period* (1988), p. 231 (hereafter cited as

Messerschmidt, *Effectiveness*); Klaus A. Maier, ''Total War and German Air Force Doctrine Before the Second World War,'' in Wilhelm Deist, ed., *The German Military in the Age of Total War* (1985), p. 213 (hereafter cited as Maier, ''Air Doctrine'' and Deist, *Total War*, respectively).

6. David Irving, *The Rise and Fall of the Luftwaffe: The Life of Field Marshal Erhard Milch* (1973), p. 31 (hereafter cited as Irving, *Milch*).

7. Jost Deulffer, ''Determinants of German Naval Policy, 1920–1939,'' in Wilhelm Deist, ed., *Total War*, p. 157 (hereafter cited as Deulffer, ''Naval Policy'').

8. Deist, *Rearmament*, p. 73.

9. Robert J. O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party, 1919–1933* (1966), p. 33 (hereafter cited as O'Neill).

10. John R. Angolia and Adolf Schlicht, *Uniforms and Traditions of the German Army* (1984), p. 30 (hereafter cited as Angolia and Schlicht).

11. Bernd Wegner, ''The 'Aristocracy of National Socialism': The Role of the SS in National Socialist Germany,'' in H. W. Koch, ed., *Aspects of the Third Reich* (1985), p. 222 (hereafter cited as Wegner, ''SS'' and Koch, *Aspects*, respectively).

12. Rudolf Lehmann, *The Leibstandarte*, Nick Olcott, trans. (1987), vol. 1, p. 1.

13. According to Wegner, ''SS,'' p. 223.

14. Dale M. Brown and the editors of Time-Life Books, *The Luftwaffe* (1982), p. 6.

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CHAPTER IV

DIPLOMATIC SUCCESSES AND PANZER DIVISIONS

HITLERIAN DIPLOMACY, 1935

Hitler's first ''bloodless conquest'' took place on January 13, 1935, when, in accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, the people of the Saar voted to end the 15-year League of Nations mandate over their small but coal rich province and to return to Germany. Following the hostile international reaction to the Saar plebiscite and to his renunciation of the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler promulgated the secret Reich Defense Law on May 21, 1935. This law changed the name of the Reichswehr to the *Wehrmacht* (armed forces), with Hitler as supreme commander. Blomberg's title changed from defense minister to war minister and (much to Goering's chagrin) commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Baron von Fritsch was named commander-in-chief of the army, and the Army Command was renamed the High Command of the Army (*Oberkommando der Heer*), commonly called OKH. General Beck's title as chief of the Truppenamt was dropped, and he was recognized for what he had been all along—chief of the General Staff of the Army. Beck, however, did not have the command prerogatives previously enjoyed by other chiefs, such as Hindenburg, the von Moltkes, and others. Simultaneously, the Air Command Office became the High Command of the Luftwaffe (*Oberkommando der Luftwaffe* or OKL), and the Navy Command became the High Command of the Navy (*Oberkommando der Marine* or OKM).

On the very evening of this day, during which he had set up the fundamental German command structure for the next war, Adolf Hitler stood in front of the Reichstag to deliver a long and carefully prepared peace speech, cleverly and diabolically designed to break his growing diplomatic isolation and simultaneously gain credibility for

his rearmaments program from the very people who had the most reason to condemn it.

During this address, Hitler rejected the very idea of war. Germany, he said, did not have the slightest intention of conquering other countries; it had merely been misunderstood. Then he made 13 specific proposals for keeping the peace, and they sounded so reasonable that they excited the admiration of the world. Among other things, he again renounced German territorial claims to Alsace and Lorraine; he repudiated the very idea of an *Anschluss* (that is, a union with Austria); and he agreed to respect the non-military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. He said that he was willing to limit the size of the new German Navy to 35 percent of that of the Royal Navy. This, he pointed out, would still leave German naval tonnage 15 percent below that of the French.

''With incredible naiveté and speed, the British government fell for Hitler's bait,'' William Shirer wrote later.[1] On June 7, Stanley Baldwin replaced Ramsay MacDonald as prime minister, and Sir Samuel Hoare was named foreign minister. A few days later, Britain and Germany began naval treaty negotiations. The German special envoy, Joachim von Ribbentrop, an old-guard Nazi and a former champagne salesman, began the first session in a particularly artless manner, essentially telling the British that they had the Fuehrer's offer: they could take it or leave it. The British reacted angrily and Paul Schmidt, the German interpreter, expected the negotiations to collapse completely. When the talks resumed later that week, however, Sir Robert Craigie, the undersecretary of state at the Foreign Office, informed the Germans that the government of Great Britain was prepared to accept Ribbentrop's demand. ''I scarcely believed my own ears,'' Schmidt recalled. ''I had reluctantly to admit that Ribbentrop's methods, which I had disliked and criticized so much, seemed to have been successful.''[2] Although they were taken aback by Ribbentrop's blunt and amateurish tactics, the British signed the London Naval Treaty on June 18. Furthermore, they signed it without consulting the League of Nations or their partners in the Stresa Front, which they effectively ruptured. As a result, in one diplomatic coup, Germany was free to build a surface fleet one-third the size of Britain's, with a submarine force 60 percent the size of the Royal Navy's (expandable to equal size under certain conditions). The treaty left Germany free to construct her fleet as rapidly as physically possible, since it would take German steel mills and shipyards about a decade to build a fleet that large. In addition, Britain had, for all practical purposes, recognized the legality of German rearmament. Hitler had gained enormous concessions and had given up nothing in return.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE GERMAN PANZER BRANCH AND ITS DOCTRINE

Meanwhile, the German Army continued to expand, as the newly trained draftees joined their units. A new Wehrkreis headquarters (Wehrkreis X) was formed at Hamburg, and it controlled the 20th Infantry Division and the 22nd Infantry Division, which was activated in Bremen on October 15, 1935. At the same time, the 23rd Infantry Division was formed at Potsdam, and the 24th Infantry was activated at Chemnitz (under Wehrkreis III and IV, respectively). But the most revolutionary events of October 15 occurred at Weimar, Wuerzburg, and Berlin, where the first three panzer divisions were activated.

The debate over the evolution of the German panzer forces had been going on, more or less continuously, since the formation of the Reichsheer. It was also tied in with the strategic and operational debates that had been going on in Prussian military circles much longer than that.

Not long after the end of the Danish War of 1864 and the American War for Southern Independence (1861–65), Helmuth von Moltke (the elder), the chief of the Prussian General Staff, recognized that the new firepower of those wars, made possible by new technology, had chiefly benefited the defense. In a future war, he hypothesized, it would be much easier to defend a position than to attack it; therefore, Prussian strategy should be offensive, but her tactics should be defensive. ''Build no fortresses, but railways!'' was one of his axioms. His views evolved into the doctrine of the *Kesselschlacht*: the decisive battle of encirclement and annihilation, the idea that later grew into the blitzkrieg. At the time, Moltke the elder's ideas were considered quite unorthodox. Since the Napoleonic Wars, the prevailing military opinion in Europe and America was that the offensive was the stronger form in both the strategic and tactical realms.

Moltke was able demonstrate the new Kesselschlacht doctrine in practice during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. First, he went on the strategic offensive and encircled a French army at Metz and shortly thereafter surrounded the main French army, which was en route to relieve Metz. Then he went over to the tactical defensive, forcing the French to try to fight their way out. The German artillery broke up every French breakout attempt, and, after suffering 17,000 casualties, French Emperor Napoleon III surrendered 104,000 survivors at Sedan—the largest field force yet captured in modern times. Metz eventually capitulated and, with the main French armies gone, Moltke surrounded Paris itself and forced its surrender in 1871, after repulsing a major breakout attempt. The Kesselschlacht doctrine had proven its value. Nevertheless, a sharply dissenting view emerged after Moltke the elder retired in 1891 and was succeeded by Alfred von Schlieffen.

Schlieffen, who tended to divorce military problems from political ones, believed that Germany could defeat France in a two-front war, provided the proper strategy was followed. This thinking resulted in the Schlieffen Plan, which combined an offensive strategy with offensive tactics, and it failed in 1914, largely because of the modifications and timidity of Moltke the younger. In short, history had proven Moltke the elder right, but it had not proven Schlieffen wrong. Such was the situation when General Hans von Seeckt became chief of the General Staff (then disgusted as the Truppenamt) in 1919.

Early in his tenure as chief of the Truppenamt, von Seeckt accessed the reasons for the defeat of the Schlieffen Plan and concluded that it failed for three main reasons: (1) the German failure to interfere with French mobilization; (2) their failure to prevent French redeployment after the initial German victories; and (3) the German failure to recognize the limitations of foot-bound and horse-drawn armies for carrying out encirclement maneuvers. Seeckt concluded that the German experience of the Great War proved that the regular army must meet three demands for the next one. First, it must attain a higher degree of mobility by making maximum use of motor transportation. Second, the logistical system must be strengthened, again by motorization. Finally, it must attain greater freedom from civilian reserves to be able to strike quickly and decisively before the enemy could mobilize. As chief of the Army Command from 1920 to 1926, he placed great emphasis on the need to develop highly mobile ground strike forces and on offensive aviation. According to his blueprint, the air force would give initial priority to the destruction of the enemy's air forces by surprise attack, followed by German aerial attacks against major enemy troop concentrations. The primary objective of these attacks would be to disrupt the enemy's mobilization. Then, the disorganized enemy would be attacked by rapidly moving forces, which would break through on narrow frontages and penetrate far into the enemy's rear, causing further disorganization and, perhaps, a total collapse.[3]

In many ways, von Seeckt was a brilliant and forward-thinking officer. He was, however, an advocate of at least one outmoded doctrine, which was a direct result of his personal experiences. On the Eastern Front in 1915, as chief of staff to August von Mackensen, Seeckt assisted in winning a major victory over the Russians at Gorlice. During this battle, Mackensen used his infantry to break through on a narrow front, and then to exploit the initial success, he used his cavalry in rapid pursuit. He employed the same tactics in the Balkans at the end of 1915 and practically destroyed the Serbian Army. These two victories convinced Seeckt that horse cavalry still had a future on the battlefield. His view, coupled with the tradition-induced blindness to new methods some officers exhibited, explains why the Reichsheer had so

many cavalry squadrons in 1930 and why the advocates of German panzer and motorized forces encountered such deeply entrenched opposition.

The leading proponent of the Panzer Branch was Heinz Guderian, now known as the ''Father of the Blitzkrieg.'' He was born in Kulm (now Chelmno, Poland) on June 17, 1888, the first son of Friedrich Guderian, an officer in the 2nd Pomeranian *Jaeger* (light infantry) Battalion. Wanting his two sons to follow in his footsteps, Friedrich sent Heinz and his brother to the cadet academy at Karlsruhe in 1901. In 1903, Heinz entered the prestigious Gross-Lichterfelde Cadet Academy (Imperial Germany's equivalent of West Point), from which he graduated in February 1907. Then, to his delight, he was assigned to the 10th Hanoverian Jaeger Battalion (at Bitche, in Lorraine) as a *Faehnrich*. His father was battalion commander at the time. From April to December 1907, he attended the War Academy at Metz and was commissioned second lieutenant on January 27, 1908.

Guderian recognized his need for advanced technological training and, on the advice of his father, transferred to the radio company of the 3rd Telegraph Battalion at Koblenz. Here, under the direction of the chief of staff of the VIII Corps, he underwent an intensive preparatory course for the General Staff qualification exam. He studied a variety of subjects, ranging from tactics at the brigade level and lower to French. Eventually he became fluent in English and qualified as a French interpreter. These languages were of immeasurable use to him in the 1920s, when virtually everything published on armored theory, tactics, or training was written in French or English. He passed his General Staff qualification exam on the first attempt and, at age 25, was the youngest of 168 officers to be enrolled in the War Academy class that began on October 5, 1913. This class never graduated; it was dissolved when Germany mobilized in August 1914. Lieutenant Guderian lost his father very early in the conflict. Major General Friedrich Guderian went to war as commander of the 35th Infantry Brigade, but he soon fell seriously ill and died following an operation. His oldest son, meanwhile, was named leader of the 3rd Heavy Wireless Station, which was attached to the 5th Cavalry Division, a part of the 2nd Army on the Western Front. Here he learned the value of forward communications and leading from the front—mainly because his divisional commander badly neglected these areas.

Guderian spent most of the war on the Western Front. He served with the 14th Wireless Section in 4th Army Headquarters (1914–16) and as Intelligence Officer at the 5th Army Headquarters (1916–17), where he took part in the Battle of Verdun. In early 1918, Guderian took an abbreviated General Staff course at Sedan (it was only two months long instead of the usual three years) and was appointed a

regular member of the General Staff on February 28, 1918. Later he remarked that this was the happiest day of his life.

In the last year of the war, Guderian (now a captain) served as quartermaster of the XXXVIII Reserve Corps, where he learned valuable lessons in logistics, and was Ia to the German Military Mission in Italy, where he learned little. After World War I, he was sent to the Baltic States as Second General Staff Officer (Ib) to General Ruediger von der Goltz's Iron Division, an outfit composed mainly of Freikorps volunteers, then fighting in Estonia.

The Allies allowed the Iron Division to fight the Bolsheviks in the Baltic States until the Communist threat in the region had been suppressed; then they forced the German government to recall the division. The Freebooters were outraged, because they had been led to believe that they would be allowed to colonize in the region. Berlin, however, had no choice but to bow to the will of the victors and ordered the unit home. Guderian never forgave Hans von Seeckt for what he regarded as a breach of faith in this incident.

Because he had been insubordinate and difficult to deal with (lifelong characteristics) in the Baltic States and because he had shown a tendency to get entangled in right-wing extremist politics, a sympathetic General Staff sent the young captain to Goslar, in what was considered a backwater area for an up-and-coming General Staff officer. Guderian spent a year commanding the 3rd Company, 10th Jaeger Battalion, during which time he helped suppress disturbances in the Ruhr, Dessau, and Bitterfeld, before being assigned to the Inspectorate of Transport Troops and attached to the 7th Bavarian Motorized Transport Battalion at Munich, where he acquired practical experience in this field. Here his battalion commander was Major Oswald Lutz, a railroad engineer who was clear thinking and receptive to innovative ideas. (Appendix 3 shows the German Army chain of command, along with each unit, its size, and the rank of its commanding officer.)

Today, many people believe that Germany's cavalry regiments were used as the main framework around which the panzer divisions were formed. This is not true—only a few of them were. In 1932, the Reichsheer had 18 cavalry regiments (15,000 men). In the next seven years, three of these regiments were converted into panzer regiments. (The 12th Cavalry in Dresden became the 3rd Panzer Regiment in October 1935; at the same time, the 4th Cavalry in Zossen became the 6th Panzer; two years later, the 7th Cavalry at Breslau moved to Eisenach and became the 2nd Panzer Regiment. Later a new 4th Cavalry Regiment was formed, using *Landespolizei* [provincial police] to fill its ranks.) The 11th Cavalry was used to form the cadre of two motorized rifle regiments, and the 16th Cavalry was disbanded to create three motorcycle battalions. By 1939, therefore, the German Army still had 14 of its 18

cavalry regiments, even though all three cavalry divisional headquarters had ceased to exist, and some of the individual squadrons within the regiments had been motorized. Two of these regiments were used to form the 1st Cavalry Brigade in East Prussia, while each of the remaining 12 were allotted to an army corps for reconnaissance duties. The cavalry regimental headquarters were not dissolved until after the war broke out, and the cavalry (including the motorized cavalry) squadrons were assigned to infantry divisions as reconnaissance battalions. The most important Reichsheer component around which the panzer branch evolved was the *Kraftfahrabteilung*: the seven motor transport battalions of the 100,000-man army.[4]

When he joined the motor transport branch in 1922, Guderian found the cause he had been seeking for years. He soon became the Reichwehr's leading advocate of motorization and of forming tank units and panzer divisions. With the true fire of a zealot, he became the ''Apostle Paul'' of the panzer branch, attempting to convert anyone who would listen to his gospel of armored warfare. Although he was unquestionably brilliant, Heinz Guderian was also fractious and irascible to the point of insubordination, and tended to ascribe any opinion different from his own to total professional incompetence and pure malicious intent on the part of the dissenter. Fortunately for him, his mentor, Oswald Lutz, was both tactful and protective of his mercurial subordinate. Lutz not only advanced Guderian and his ideas; he probably saved his colleague's career in its early stages.

After his introductory tour with the 7th Motorized Transport, Guderian moved to the Transport Inspectorate in Berlin. Here he worked well with the first inspector, the highly exacting Lieutenant General Erich von Tschischwitz, who attempted to alter the function of the Kraftfahrabteilung from merely divisional trucking battalions to experimental tactical units. His successor, Major General von Natzmer, however, decided the mission of the motorized transport battalions was to haul flour. Guderian naturally could not get along with this officer, so he transferred to Stettin as a staff officer with the 2nd Infantry Division, now under General von Tschischwitz.

Tschischwitz used his brilliant but belligerent staff officer in the best possible way: as an instructor in tactics and military history. In this post, Guderian was left free to pursue theoretical and historical work, and to develop his theories about mechanized and armored warfare. Central to his theories was the *Stosskraft*—the dynamic punch. Using history, he attempted to demonstrate that the Stosskraft was subject to technological change. He was also free to study and translate the works of foreigners, notably British Major General J. M. C. Fuller, the former chief of the Royal Tank Corps (R.T.C.), but also Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, G. le Q. Mantel, and Charles de Gaulle. Guderian, however,

carried the doctrines of Fuller, Hart, and others one step further: instead of pointing out the advantages of tanks operating alone (as the R.T.C. had in World War I), or following the concept of tanks and motorized infantry working together (as envisioned by Hart), he conceived the doctrine of a complete armored and motorized force, in which the combat components of all branches would be represented. The panzer division, and later the panzer army, he hypothesized, should include motorized and mechanized infantry, mobile signal units, self-propelled artillery, motorized engineers, reconnaissance troops in armored cars, and supply units that could keep up with and support them. All of this, of course, lay in the future. His immediate concern was to convert the motorized transport battalions into combat units.

There was resistance to these revolutionary concepts from the very beginning. Despite Guderian's efforts, many in the Truppenamt agreed with Seeckt's successor, Heye, and insisted that motor transport was simply an aid to the cavalry and infantry—a more flexible mode of transportation than the railroad, but little more than that. In 1926, however, von Natzmer was succeeded as inspector of transport by the forward-thinking Alfred von Vollard-Bockelberg, who reversed his predecessor's decision that motor transport battalions were mere haulers of supplies. It was he who coined the word *Kraftfahrkampftruppen* (motorized battle troops). The following year, Blomberg became chief of the clandestine General Staff, and Guderian returned to the Truppenamt. Under Blomberg and Vollard-Bockelberg, definite progress toward motorization and mechanization began. The secret German armored school opened up at Kama in the Soviet Union. Six heavy and three medium German tanks (23 tons and 12 tons, respectively) were built and sent there in 1928, and Germany began to develop a cadre of trained tank officers. Among the first to qualify were Ritter Wilhelm von Thoma and Joseph Harpe. Meanwhile, in Germany, the III Battalion of the 9th Infantry Regiment at Spandau was equipped with dummy mockups, so practical exercises in mechanized warfare became possible.[5]

In 1929, Vollard-Bockelberg moved up and became head of the Army Armaments Office (*Heeres-Waffenamt* or Wa H), and the motorization of the German Army began in earnest. Later that year, the formation of the first motorcycle and mechanized reconnaissance companies began. Guderian, meanwhile, ran afoul of the new chief of the transport inspectorate, Major General Otto von Stuelpnagel. Although he believed in the concept of motorized combat troops, Stuelpnagel thought Guderian's notions about panzer divisions were Utopian and ordered him to stop trying to spread the idea. This Guderian (a major since 1927) refused to do. As a result, at the

beginning of 1930, he was transferred again, this time to Berlin-Lankwitz, as the commander of the 3rd (Prussian) Motor Transport Battalion of the 3rd Infantry Division. Although he was promoted to lieutenant colonel on February 1, 1931, he did not return to General Staff duties until October 1, as chief of staff to the new inspector of motor transport troops: Major General Oswald Lutz.

Here in Berlin, Lutz and Guderian formed an almost perfect team. The clear-thinking Lutz provided the tact and authority, while Guderian supplied the ideas and the fiery genius that drove the inspectorate forward. Under them, they assembled a group of highly talented subordinates who would later make their marks as panzer leaders in World War II. They included Walter Nehring, Hermann Breith, Walter Chales de Beaulieu, and Werner Kempf, who designed the first six-wheel armored car in the early 1930s.

Meanwhile, the first German panzers were secretly manufactured, the tanks upon which the Third Reich would rely until 1943–44 (and use throughout the war) were designed, and several prototypes were constructed. The first was also the worst. The Panzer Mark I (PzKw I) was a two-man tank, weighing about six tons, with two machine guns mounted on the turret. In the first months of World War II, it was used as a small assault vehicle and was of marginal value. Guderian later explained that it had been designed strictly as a training vehicle, adding, ''Nobody in 1932 could have guessed that one day we should have to go into action with this little tank.''[6] It did, however, have the advantage of being inexpensive and relatively easy to produce. By the end of 1936, 3,000 Mark Is were already with the units. The Mark II (PzKw II) was an improvement, but not much of one. It was heavier (10 to 11 tons, depending upon the model), had a three-man crew, and boasted a 20-millimeter main battle gun, but only a single machine gun. It also had technical problems and thin armor, which could be penetrated by the smallest anti-tank gun. In the spring of 1935, however, it did have the advantage of being the only panzer available for mass production. ''Don't you raise difficulties, I must have those tanks!'' Guderian told the representative from the technical branch, who balked at accepting the Mark II into the army inventory.[7] And so they went into mass production. After better tanks became available, this light tank was used for reconnaissance, where its speed (up to 35 miles per hour [mph]) was an advantage. After 1940, many of the PzKw IIs were given to Germany's allies.

The Third Reich developed two medium battle tanks in the late 1930s: the PzKw III and IV. Both were heavier and of much better design than their forerunners. The Mark IV weighed about 20 tons and had a crew of five. It had two machine guns and a 75-millimeter short-barrel main battle gun, which was designed for direct support of the

infantry, but it was too short for tank-to-tank combat. This role was assigned to the PzKw III, the earliest models of which had a 37-millimeter gun (later models had a long-barrel 50-millimeter gun). Other than that, its characteristics were similar to the PzKw IV. Both were mechanically reliable, but no German tank was equal to the heavily armed and more thickly armored French tanks. The Germans had no heavy tanks until 1943 (partially because German-engineered bridges and many European highway bridges were not designed to accommodate more than 24 tons), and the PzKw IIIs and IVs were just coming into series production when the war broke out. In all, the German panzer units were hardly the overwhelming monolith that Goebbels' propaganda machine made them out to be. Appendix 4 shows the characteristics of the main German panzers, as well as selected Allied tanks.

The German tanks had one thing that separated them from many of their opponents—that is, reasonably good radios. Colonel Fritz Fellgiebel, the inspector of signal troops, declared early on that adequate communications was the only way to make the armored weapon work, and he and his men developed radio sets that were reliable and simple to maintain and operate, had an adequate range (even for the widespread operations Guderian envisioned), and could be easily tuned, even taking into account the enormous vibrations of a tank.

Guderian and his visions for the panzer branch made both friends and enemies in the higher echelons of the German Army. Blomberg and von Reichenau became proponents of armored warfare and large panzer formations, as did Baron von Fritsch (although to a lesser extent). Other officers in the higher echelons frankly were anti-panzer, such as some of the cavalry officers. Others, such as Otto von Stuelpnagel and Lieutenant General Friedrich Fromm, the chief of the Army Equipment Office, were in favor of tanks, but they opposed Guderian's ideas of how to use them. General Beck, for example, thought that tanks could be used properly as infantry support vehicles—nothing else. This was the view of the entire High Command of the French Army, and it was shared by many of their counterparts in Berlin. The most important supporter Guderian and his ideas had, however, was Adolf Hitler.

Hitler considered himself a revolutionary, and his party looked upon itself as a revolutionary party, so it is logical that they would embrace revolutionary military concepts. In early 1934, Hitler conducted an inspection of new army equipment at Kummersdorf. For 30 minutes, Guderian was allowed to demonstrate the basic components of the panzer division he envisioned: motorcycle units, an anti-tank platoon, reconnaissance vehicles and a panzer platoon, equipped with experimental tanks. ''That's what I need!'' cried the delighted Fuehrer. ''That's what I want to have!''

Have them he did. It was largely because of Hitler's support that the Panzer Troops Command and the first three panzer divisions were established in 1935, and Oswald Lutz became the first *General der Panzertruppen* (general of panzer troops) on November 1, 1935. Also of significance was the support given to the panzer arm by the party, especially General of SA Adolf Huehnlein's National Socialist Motor Corps (Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrerkorps or NSKK), which has never been given the credit it deserves. Its 24 driving schools trained 187,000 truck and tank drivers from 1933 to 1939 (the vast majority of them after Huehnlein survived the Blood Purge of 1934). These schools essentially solved the problem of providing basic and intermediate-level training for the crews of Germany's motorized forces.

Ludwig Beck was, of course, uncomfortable and unhappy with the progress Guderian and his colleagues were making, and he did not get to be chief of the General Staff without learning something about political infighting. He decided to slow the progress of the evolving panzer force by removing Guderian, the real heart of the Panzer Troop Command. His strategy was as clever as it was effective: get Guderian away from Berlin by seeming to promote him. On October 15, 1935, Heinz Guderian assumed command of the 2nd Panzer Division at Wuerzberg, even though he was only a colonel. Under ordinary circumstances, an officer had to be at least a major general to receive a divisional command, and most commanders at this level were lieutenant generals.

The other two panzer division commanders were neither tank officers nor sympathizers with Guderian. Lieutenant General Ernst Fessmann, the leader of the 3rd Panzer Division in Berlin, was a veteran cavalry officer who was nearing retirement. He would be promoted to *charakteristik* (honorary) general of panzer troops when he retired in 1937, after more than 37 years service.[8] The 1st Panzer Division commander was also from the Old School: Lieutenant General Baron Maximilian von Weichs, who had begun his service with the 2nd Bavarian Heavy Cavalry Regiment in 1900. The bulk of his 35 years service had been with the cavalry branch, most recently as commander of the 1st Cavalry Division. When he was promoted the following year, he became, at his own request, a general of cavalry, not a general of panzer troops. Later, as an army and army group commander in World War II, he did not distinguish himself as a commander of armored forces—quite the opposite, in fact—as we shall see.

Beck and Major General Victor von Schwelder (his chief of the Army Personnel Office) had done the panzer branch no favors with these appointments. With Guderian removed from Berlin, the Panzer Troops Command lost its nerve center. Guderian was replaced as chief of staff by Colonel Friedrich Paulus, an indecisive officer who was much more

pliable and who took pains to avoid conflict and controversy. With Guderian gone, the Panzer Troops Command was unable to prevent other interests from making inroads into the unity of the armored force. A brigade's worth of panzers were siphoned off to infantry support units, the cavalry branch acquired control of the motorized reconnaissance battalions, the infantry branch obtained control of most of the motorized rifle regiments (to form motorized infantry divisions), and the anti-tank battalions and assault gun units were handed over to the artillery. While busy doing his troop duty at Wuerzberg, Guderian's dream of a unified command for all mobile combat forces was shattered.

NOTES

1. William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960), (hereafter cited as Shirer).

2. Paul Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter* (1951), p. 35 (hereafter cited as Schmidt, *Interpreter*).

3. Larry Addington, *The Blitzkrieg and the German General Staff, 1865–1941* (1971), p. 30 (hereafter cited as Addington).

4. Albert Seaton, *The German Army, 1933–1945* (1981; reprint ed., 1982) (hereafter cited as Seaton, *German Army*).

5. The commander of this unit was Major Ernst Busch, a future field marshal of rather limited intelligence, who later did a rather poor job in handling armored formations. His adjutant was Lieutenant (later General of Panzer Troops) Walter Wenck, who seems to have learned a great deal more than his chief, and who distinguished himself both during and after the war.

6. Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader* (1957; reprint ed., 1967), p. 18 (hereafter cited as Guderian).

7. Seaton, *German Army*.

8. General Fessman was born on January 6, 1881, and entered the Imperial Army as a Fahnenjunker in 1900. He retired in 1937 as a general of panzer troops but returned to active duty when the war broke out. In 1939, he commanded the 267th Infantry Division, a unit of older troops used mainly for defensive purposes. In 1941, he joined a special instructional staff at Frankfurt/Oder, but retired for a second and final time in 1942. He retired to Pullach and died on October 25, 1962. See Wolf Keilig, *Die Generale des Heeres* (1983), p. 89 (hereafter cited as Keilig).

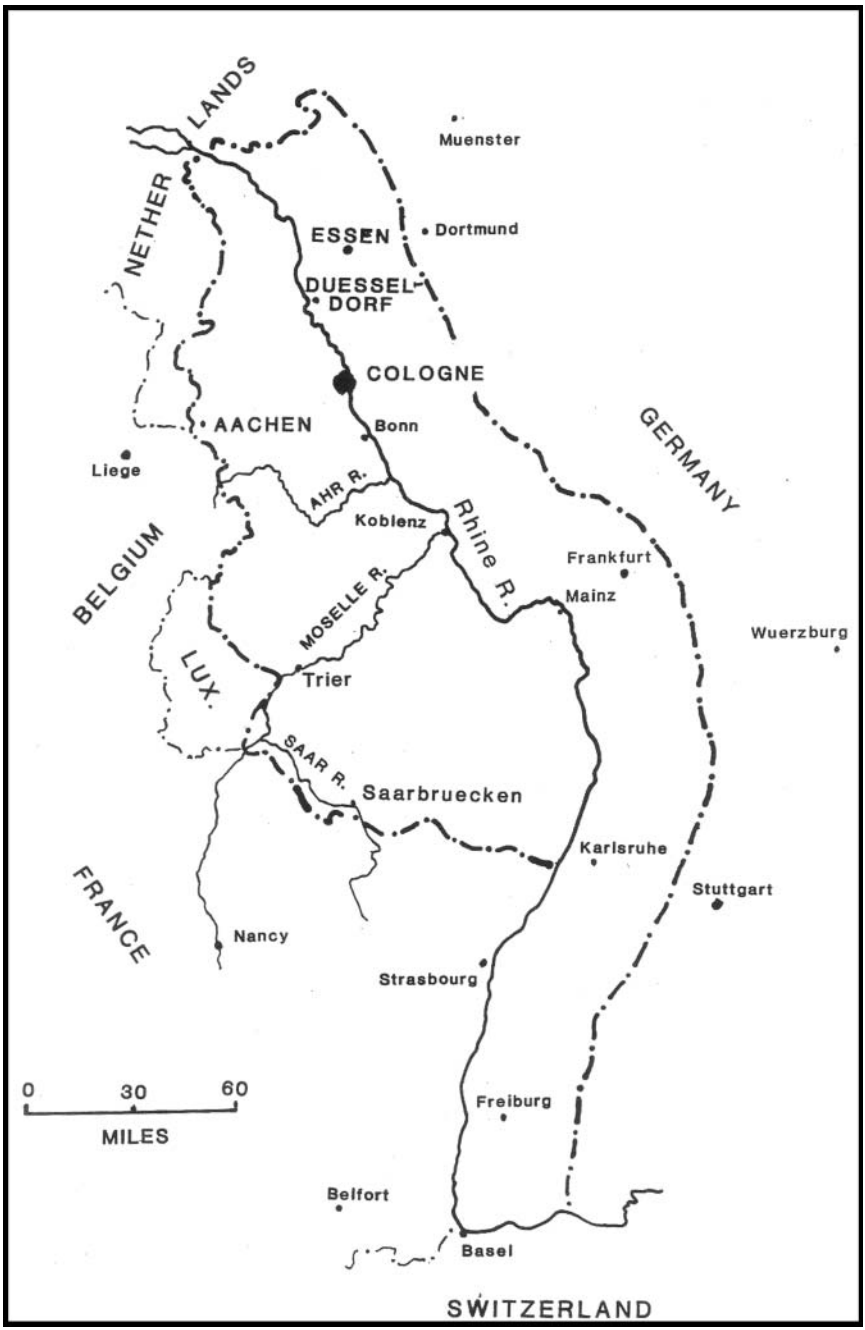
CHAPTER V
THE RHINELAND CRISIS

Even while his armed forces were in the process of expanding, Adolf Hitler embarked upon his *Blumenkrieg* (Flower Wars)—the bloodless conquests of the Rhineland, Austria, the Sudentenland, Czechoslovakia, and Memel.

From the beginning of the military expansion, the German generals felt hamstrung by the fact that the Treaty of Versailles had made the Rhineland (the region between France and Germany) a demilitarized zone. Most people do not realize how large it was (33,655 square miles, or 18.5 percent of Germany's land area) or how many citizens lived there (15,400,000 people, or 24 percent of the total population of the Reich). It was larger than the nation of Austria and had more than twice its population.

The Rhineland had figured prominently in German military strategy in the West since 1920. In their contingency plans, which provided for a worst-case scenario of war on both the Eastern and Western Fronts, German military planners envisioned a rapid reoccupation of the Rhineland, followed quickly by a French reaction. The planners, naturally enough, divided the Rhineland into two zones: one east of the Rhine, the other to the west (see Figure 5.1). The western zone was further subdivided into three sections. The southern sector, between the Moselle and the Rhine, was considered the most vulnerable and was to be sacrificed without serious resistance. Here the French were to be delayed mainly by road blocks, blown bridges, and so forth. The central sector, between the Moselle and the Ahr, was to be defended by the provincial police (*Landespolizei*), the border police (*Grenzschutz*), and other security forces. They were expected to exploit the difficult terrain of the Eifel (the German Ardennes) to delay the enemy as long as possible, but to do so without becoming decisively engaged. They were then to retreat north of the Ahr, into the third sector, where they were to join regular Reichswehr troops. This northern sector was to be held

Figure 5.1
The Rhineland Demilitarized Zone



at all costs, to prevent the French from seizing the Ruhr, the loss of which would be fatal to the German war effort.

Meanwhile, east of the Rhine, everything possible was to be done to prevent the French from crossing the river. Bridges were to be blown, boats and barges were to be sunk or taken to the eastern side, and Reichsheer units were to dig in along the river. Here, on the east bank of the Rhine, they were to make their decisive stand, 18 to 25 miles within the demilitarized zone. Given the terrain and the international political situation, it was a good and appropriate scheme of operations. Although they were forbidden to have soldiers within the demilitarized zone, Germany did have forces there—militarized police forces. Under the terms of the treaty, Germany was allowed to have 31,500 professional policemen, but Berlin kept these detachments 10 to 12 percent over strength. This figure was set by the foreign office, which estimated that the Allies would tolerate this many excess lawmen, but perhaps not more. In 1933, more than 13,000 Rhineland policemen were separated from the other police departments and incorporated into the *Landespolizei* (LAPO), a paramilitary organization. These young men were actually soldiers, and, although they had no artillery, they were trained and equipped as soldiers in every other way. On August 1, 1935, when 61 of the 89 LAPO battalions outside of the Rhineland were incorporated into the army, they were absorbed without difficulty. All they did was exchange their green police uniforms for the field gray and picked up their steel helmets.

Strategically, the demilitarized Rhineland presented the army with a serious problem. In case of war, it was quite conceivable that a French offensive could ''bounce the Rhine,'' threaten the Ruhr, and, in conjunction with a Soviet-Czechoslovakian offensive from the east, cut the Reich in two. Occupation of the Rhine defensive barrier would make such an action extremely unlikely. Seizing on the pretext of a Franco-Soviet pact (ratified by the French Chamber of Deputies on February 27), Hitler told his top generals of his decision to reoccupy the Rhineland.

''Contrary to what was once believed,'' Emmerson wrote, ''the first and only plan for restoring military sovereignty in the Rhineland was drafted five days before the coup.''[1] It is true that at least one prominent historian has cited an earlier date, but the plan to which he refers was a contingency plan, in which the Rhineland would be remilitarized in case a general European war became imminent. This general contingency plan was a far cry from the detailed operations order General von Blomberg issued on March 2. The most striking difference between the two, of course, is that contingency plans (which all nations have) are quite general and are only rarely carried out. The operations order of March 2 was quite specific and the units were to commence operations within a few days.[2]

It has been erroneously reported by more than one historian that the occupation of the Rhineland involved only three battalions (that is, fewer than 3,000 men). This is ridiculous, especially when one considers that the region was larger than the states of Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut combined, and that its population was larger than the 2005 combined total of the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, and Colorado. In actuality, Blomberg's plan called for Fritsch to assemble 19 infantry and 13 artillery battalions (22,000 men) on the edges of the demilitarized zone on the night of March 6–7. Operating under the command of Wehrkreise VI and IX (Lieutenant Generals von Kluge and Dollmann, respectively), they would cross into the zone before dawn on March 7. Simultaneously, the 21 Landespolizei battalions in the Rhineland would be incorporated into the army as infantry battalions, giving the occupation force a strength of about 36,000 men in 53 combat battalions. These battalions would be supported by 156 guns (the military term for artillery pieces) and 54 fighter aircraft (Arado-65 biplanes), but they would have no offensive weapons, such as bombers or panzers. Twenty-eight of the battalions would remain east of the Rhine, and another seven would remain within a few miles of the west bank. Only three infantry battalions would approach the German frontier with France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. One battalion (II/39th Infantry Regiment) would occupy Aachen, the I Battalion of the 38th Infantry would move into Trier, and the II/38th Infantry would head for Saarbruecken. Since 1936, it has been stated that these battalions were ordered to flee back to Germany as rapidly as possible if they met French resistance. This is a myth. If attacked, they were ordered to fall back to previously prepared positions and ''halt the enemy advance'' for as long as possible, before retreating toward the Rhine. Meanwhile, if the French Army attacked in strength, the German Army was to conduct a fighting retreat to the Roer River-Rhine-Black Forest Line, where it was expected to check the enemy advance. This position, however, would be defended by 13 infantry divisions (more than 60 battalions), some 24,000 policemen, and panzer and SS units, as well as SA, NSKK, Hitler Youth, and Reich Labor Service (RAD) auxiliaries.[3]

Ludwig Beck, a cautious and conservative officer, opposed the entire operation as being too risky, and Fritsch is said to have protested against the order when he received it on March 2.[4] His detailed orders to the units, however, showed no such timidity. If they met resistance, he commanded, they were to stand and fight. There were no orders to withdraw if they merely made contact.[5]

During the early morning hours of Saturday, March 7, German soldiers entered the demilitarized zone, taking virtually the entire world,

including the diplomatic community and the international press corps, by surprise. At 10 A.M., Baron von Neurath called in the shocked ambassadors of Britain, France, and Italy, and handed them a formal note renouncing the Locarno Treaty, which Germany had just broken. Remarkably enough, he proceeded to hand the astonished diplomats new German proposals for a general peace settlement. Among other things, these proposals included a 25-year non-aggression pact with Belgium and France, to be guaranteed by London and Rome. It also called for the demilitarization of both sides of the Franco-German border, which sounds reasonable until one considers that this would force the French to scrap the Maginot Line, on which they had spent billions and were pinning all their hopes for checking German aggression.

At noon, Adolf Hitler appeared at the Kroll Opera House and addressed the Reichstag and a ''delirious audience.''[6] He spoke for 90 minutes, and it was one of his best orations. He calmly announced that France's pact with the Soviet Union had broken and invalidated the Locarno Treaty and that he had been driven to this act with the greatest reluctance. He repeated the peace proposals Neurath had given the ambassadors earlier; then he dissolved the Reichstag and called for new elections and a referendum on his Rhineland move.

Meanwhile, at 1 P.M., at the very moment Hitler was reaching the climax of his address, three battalions of German infantry crossed the Rhine River at the Hohenzollern Bridge at Cologne (now Koeln) and headed for Aachen, Trier, and Saarbruecken, amid jubilant crowds that paved their way with flowers. Overhead flew the Luftwaffe in their Arado-65 biplanes, providing fighter support; however, only one group of these (about 15 aircraft) had real machine guns. The rest of the airplanes, Wolfgang Falck recalled, ''were as harmless as moths. One French fighter wing would have been able to obliterate the whole German Air Force in those days.'' Their bluff was not called, however.[7] In London, British Foreign Secretary Eden called the entire operation ''the most carefully prepared example of Hitler's brazen but skillful methods. The illegal deed was abundantly wrapped up with assurances for the present and promises for the future.... The timing was perfect, including the usual choice of a weekend.''[8]

Hitler's Rhineland gamble succeeded because he presented the Western democracies with a well-timed *fait accompli*. This was accomplished because he made excellent use of the military principles of surprise and security. Indeed, from a military point of view, the most striking and impressive aspect of this entire operation was the secrecy that surrounded it. As far as we can determine (since the records are not complete), Hitler only revealed his plans to nine people before the first week in March: Goering, Goebbels, Ribbentrop, Neurath, Fritsch, Blomberg, Ulrich von Hassell (the ambassador to Rome), Dirk Forster (the

charge d'affaires in Paris), and Bernhard Wilhelm von Buelow (Neurath's state secretary). Most of the senior German diplomats were not informed of the operation until 24 hours before it commenced. Military preparations did not begin until March 2, and the operations departments of the three services had less than one day to produce plans, orders, and troop movement schedules. These were sent to the effected units on March 3, along with a warning order, but they were not given their march date and time until March 5. Hitler himself may not have chosen March 7 as ''Null Day'' until March 4.

Foreign reaction to the occupation was confused and slow in coming. Meanwhile, in the German camp, the parades were over and no one could do anything except await the Allied reaction; naturally, nerves became frayed. General Alfred Jodl, then a colonel on the Wehrmacht operations staff, later testified at Nuremberg: ''Considering the situation we were in, the French covering army could have blown us to pieces.''[9] General von Fritsch, the commander-in-chief of the army, was also afraid that Hitler had acted too early and was worried about a French reaction.[10]

The heaviest burden fell on General von Blomberg, the war minister. He received some alarming dispatches from his military attaches, most notably from Baron Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg in London, which caused him a great deal of worry. Then, between March 8 and 13, General Maurice Gamelin, the French commander-in-chief, concentrated 13 divisions near the German frontier. He did this merely to reinforce the Maginot Line, but Blomberg did not know this. Finally, he received unconfirmed reports that the French were assembling a motorized army of a quarter of a million men just behind the Maginot, with the obvious purpose of clearing the Rhineland as soon as their preparations were complete. This was enough to frighten Blomberg. Backed by Beck, Jodl, and others, he twice sent Colonel Friedrich Hossbach to see Hitler, to convince him to withdraw the three forward battalions. This Hitler refused to do. Finally, the war minister sent Hossbach a telegram, asking the Fuehrer for a personal interview, so he could appeal for a retreat. The foreign office, however, warned Hitler beforehand about the contents of this dispatch. When Hossbach handed it to him, Hitler stuffed it into his pocket without reading it. Later, Blomberg had to endure the humiliation of having to ask for it back. Hitler subsequently stated that von Blomberg acted like a ''hysterical maiden'' during the crisis[11] and told General von Rundstedt that Blomberg's proposal was nothing less than an act of cowardice.[12]

It is true that Hitler's decision to reject Blomberg's advice and hold his position under any circumstances short of the initiation of actual military action by the Allies saved the situation for the Germans. In fact, for years thereafter, Hitler never tired of congratulating himself in

front of his often-bored entourage on the remarkable courage and nerves of steel he exhibited during the Rhineland crisis. But is it true, as some historians have suggested, that a French reaction would have spelled the end of the Nazi regime and spared the world World War II? It is doubtful. Hitler later told Paul Schmidt, Hans Frank, and Prime Minister Kurt von Schuschnigg of Austria (in often-repeated quote) that, had the French advanced, he would have had to retreat ''with our tails between our legs.''[13] During his February 12, 1938, harangue to Schuschnigg, however, Hitler added, ''If France had marched then, we would have had to withdraw perhaps about 60 kilometers [40 miles]; even then we would have held them.''[14] This statement, coupled with Hitler's previous and subsequent actions, suggests that a French reaction would not have avoided World War II; however, it would have started three years earlier and on terms far more advantageous to the Allies. Under those circumstances, perhaps the Holocaust could have been avoided.

In the opinion of this author, the historians who have written that a French advance into the Rhineland would have caused the fall of the Nazi regime have taken quite a lot for granted. Do they believe that Hitler's domestic opposition would have overthrown him? What domestic opposition? The German public was firmly behind him, and his domestic political opposition had been eliminated almost three years before. The only force that could have overthrown him was the military, and Blomberg (despite an occasional fit of nerves) was pro-Nazi, and his deputy, Reichenau, was even more so. Fritsch, the commander-in-chief of the army, was a non-Nazi, but he could never bring himself to act against the regime, even after it betrayed him in 1938. Even the chief of the General Staff, General Beck, who later became a leading anti-Hitler conspirator, was a non-Nazi in 1936, as opposed to being an anti-Nazi. Furthermore he was an officer, obeying the orders of his supreme commander, to whom he was bound by a personal oath of loyalty. He would take no action to overthrow the regime at this time (a position he later changed, as we shall see). Finally, unlike his counterparts in Great Britain, France, and the United States, the chief of the General Staff of the German Army did not actually have troop units under his command.

Do these historians, then, think Hitler would have resigned or voluntarily stepped down following a reversal in the Rhineland? Surely he would not have done so. After all, he lost the Rhineland in 1944–45 (and a great deal else besides), and yet he continued to fight and cling to his diminishing power until Germany had been devastated and the Russians were only 300 yards or so from his bunker. Then he shot himself. Would he have acted any differently in 1936? It is highly unlikely. Hitler said on the evening of January 30, 1933, that he would never

leave his office alive, and this is one of the very few promises he kept. If the Allies wanted to rid Europe of Hitler in 1936, they had only one option, and it was exactly the same one they were finally able to exercise in 1945: decisively defeat him militarily, destroy his armed forces, overrun his country, destroy his regime, and capture his capital. A French or Anglo-French conquest of the Rhineland would not have done the trick, even assuming, of course, that Gamelin *could* have recaptured the Rhineland. That the French could have retaken the zone west of the Rhine is a given; that they could have launched a successful river-crossing operation and smashed the German forces east of the river is far less certain. Gamelin, after all, was not a Napoleon or Robert E. Lee. Or an Eisenhower.

In any case, military reaction was not forthcoming, in spite of a series of intransigent speeches Hitler gave on March 12, 14, 16, and 20. On March 19, 1936, the Council of the League of Nations unanimously condemned Nazi Germany as a treaty breaker but did not impose sanctions on it, largely because the Reich was too strong economically, and too many countries would be forced to act in their own vital interests, ignoring any restrictions invoked against Germany. The Reich was, after all, the leading trading partner of all six Danubian states, as well as of Greece and Turkey. It was also the second-largest trading partner of Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Portugal, and Chile. None of these countries could afford to cut off trade with Germany over the Rhineland crisis, or even sharply curtail it, even if they had been so inclined, which is questionable. For the next several weeks, British diplomats laboriously worked through Ribbentrop to extract some concessions on the issue of fortifications on the Franco-German frontier, but they came away empty handed. Berlin refused to accept anything less than full equality relative to France. By mid-April, the diplomatic lines had been drawn: the French were not going to go one inch out of their way to include Hitler in a new Locarno, which was just fine with the Fuehrer, who was not prepared to join one.

The reoccupation of the Rhineland irrevocably changed the strategic situation in Europe. With her Rhine frontier secure, the Ruhr—Germany's industrial heart—was now safe from the threat of Allied military action. All restraint on unilateral German rearmament could be safety thrown off and was. March 1936 was the last chance the Western Allies would have to halt Nazi aggression while the military balance was still overwhelmingly in their favor. Resolute action at this time probably would have resulted in a general European war three and a half years before one actually broke out, but it would likely have spared France and most of her allies long, hard years of Nazi occupation, and probably (but not certainly) would have prevented the slaughter of the European Jewry. The Rhineland crisis was the

beginning of the end for France. Her allies in the east (the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia) were suddenly faced with the reality that Paris would not stand up to the Nazis on her own frontier. What were the odds, they wondered, of France honoring her treaty obligations with them? Also, by May 1936, the German labor battalions were feverishly working on the West Wall, as their fortifications on the Franco-German border were called. Soon, the French Army would be able to tie down only a fraction of the German Army, while the rest was free to operate in the East or elsewhere. As a result of these new fears, Hitler was able to continue slowly eroding the alliance system France had built up since 1919. The first country to leave the French fold had been Poland; Belgium followed on October 16, 1936, when it repudiated its 1921 military alliance with France and declared its absolute neutrality. This, in turn, exposed France's northern frontier to a rapid German strike and further complicated France's defense problems. For the moment, however, Hitler was not interested in developments in the West. He had turned his attention to the south.

NOTES

1. James T. Emmerson, *The Rhineland Crisis* (1977), p. 28 (hereafter cited as Emmerson). This, in my view, is the best volume yet written about the Rhineland crisis.
2. International Military Tribunal, *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal* (1946–48), vol. 2, pp. 342–44 (hereafter cited as IMT); also see IMT, vol. 10, pp. 474–76; vol. 15, pp. 445–47; vol. 19, p. 452; and vol. 34, pp. 485–86. United States Chief Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (1946), vol. 1, pp. 440–41 (hereafter cited as *NCA*).
3. D. C. Watt, ''German Plans for the Reoccupation of the Rhineland: A Note,'' *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 1 (1966), p. 197 (hereafter cited as Watt, ''Rhineland'').
4. Emmerson, p. 98; IMT, vol. 20, p. 603; Goerlitz, *General Staff*, p. 352; William Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army* (1956), p. 486.
5. Watt, ''Rhineland,'' pp. 197–98.
6. Shirer, p. 291.
7. Trevor J. Constable and Raymond F. Toliver, *Horrido!* (1968), p. 134 (hereafter cited as Constable and Toliver, *Horrido!*). The only group with machine guns was Falck's. Its pilots were mainly instructor pilots from Albert Keller's fighter pilots' school at Schleissheim.
8. Emmerson, ''Rhineland,'' pp. 102–3.
9. IMT, vol. 15, p. 352.

10. Messerschmidt, *Effectiveness*, p. 230.
11. Matthew Cooper, *The German Army, 1933–1945* (1978), p. 54 (hereafter cited as Cooper, *German Army*).
12. IMT, vol. 21, p. 22.
13. Schmidt, *Interpreter*, p. 41.
14. Kurt von Schuschnigg, *Austrian Requiem*, Franz von Hildebrand, trans. (1946), p. 43 (hereafter cited as Schuschnigg, *Requiem*).

CHAPTER VI

EXPANSION AND TRAINING

CONSOLIDATION AND EXPANSION

Following his successful adventure in the Rhineland, Adolf Hitler focused his diplomatic attentions on Mussolini, in attempts to induce him to form an alliance with Germany. Meanwhile, it was left to Blomberg, Fritsch, and Beck to organize the new territory, integrate it into the Wehrmacht, and continue the military expansion. Just before the reoccupation of the Rhineland, Fritsch had formed a new Wehrkreis (XI) at Hanover, to support and control the units in southern Hanover, Brunswick, Anhalt, Magdeburg, and Saxony-Lippe. Initially this headquarters controlled the 13th and 19th Infantry Divisions (which later became the 13th and 19th Panzer Divisions) at Hanover and Magdeburg, respectively. About half of the newly occupied Rhineland came under the newly created Wehrkreis XII, headquartered at Wiesbaden. The rest became part of the enlarged Wehrkreise V and VI. By October, 1936, four new infantry divisions had been established in the Rhineland: the 25th, 26th, 33rd, and 34th. The Rhineland Landespolizei formed the bulk of the cadres around which these units were built. Elsewhere in the Reich, eight other infantry divisions (numbered 25 through 36) were created. Table 6.1 shows the organization of the German Army in 1935, along with its major commanders. Note that a third army-level headquarters (Army Group 3 in Dresden) had been created in 1935.

With such a rapid expansion, Fritsch in particular faced a great many problems. It was originally intended, for example, that all infantry regiments have three battalions of four companies each, plus a regimental cannon company (the 13th Company) and an anti-tank company (the 14th Company) by the latter part of 1935. By the end of the year, however, 18 regiments had only two battalions, and the idea

Table 6.1
Organization of the German Army, End of 1935

Commander-in-Chief of OKH: General of Artillery Baron Werner von Fritsch
Chief of the General Staff: General of Artillery Ludwig Beck
Army Group 1: General of Infantry Gerd von Rundstedt
Wehrkreis I: Lt. Gen. Walter von Brauchitsch
Wehrkreis II: Lt. Gen. Johannes Blaskowitz
Wehrkreis III: Lt. Gen. Erwin von Witzleben
Wehrkreis VIII: Lt. Gen. Ewald von Kleist
Army Group 2: General of Artillery Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb
Wehrkreis V: Lt. Gen. Hermann Geyer
Wehrkreis VI: Lt. Gen. Guenther von Kluge
Wehrkreis IX: Lt. Gen. Friedrich Dollmann
Army Group 3: General of Infantry Fedor von Bock
Wehrkreis IV: General of Infantry Wilhelm von List
Wehrkreis VII: Lt. Gen. Walter von Reichenau
Wehrkreis X: Lt. Gen. Wilhelm Knochenhauer

Note:
Bock was promoted to General of Infantry on Mar. 1, 1935, and List was promoted on Nov. 1, 1935. The following officers were promoted in 1936: Knochenhauer (to General of Cavalry, Jan. 1); Dollmann (to General of Artillery, Apr. 1); Brauchitsch (to General of Artillery, Apr. 20); Blaskowitz (to General of Infantry, Aug. 1); Kleist (to General of Cavalry, Aug. 1); Geyer (to General of Infantry, Aug. 1); Reichenau (to General of Artillery, Nov. 1); and Witzleben (to General of Infantry, Nov. 1). Kluge was promoted to General of Artillery on Aug. 1, but with a date of rank of Dec. 1, 1935, giving him seniority over all those listed in this note, except Bock and List.

of ''training battalions'' or ''training companies'' within the line regiments had been abandoned, as the divisions and Wehrkreise assumed more responsibility for this function.

An even more difficult problem caused by the too-rapid expansion was the shortage of qualified officers and NCOs. When Hitler took power on January 30, 1933, Germany had an army of around 4,000 officers and slightly more than 100,000 enlisted men in seven divisions. By the beginning of 1936, the German Army had more than half a million men in 36 infantry divisions, three panzer divisions, and three separate panzer or motorized brigades. This meant it needed at least 20,000 more commissioned officers, plus 10,000 above that to put the army on a wartime footing. About 1,500 Reichsheer NCOs were commissioned directly, as were about 2,500 police officers. Another 2,000 or so Imperial Army officers were allowed to return to active duty, and the training time required to produce a second lieutenant was cut from four years to two and a half years. This, coupled with the output of the four *Kriegsschulen* (War Schools or Officer Training Schools), located at

Potsdam, Munich, Hanover, and Dresden, increased the number of officers commissioned each year from 180 in 1933 to more than 3,000 by 1937, but demand still far exceeded supply. Finally, older supplementary officers (*Ergaenzungsoffizieren*) were reactivated to fill administrative or department positions. Originally these officers were part of the Corps of Territorial Defense Officers (*Landesschutzoffizierkorps*), which was established on October 1, 1933. These officers were recalled to active duty to fill staff positions only, and, until 1935, were required to wear civilian clothes and were noted on records as retired. On March 5, 1935, the Corps of Territorial Defense Officers was renamed the Corps of Supplementary Officers, and on September 7 of the following year, the ''Corps'' designation was dropped. Supplementary officers were abbreviated E (for *Ergaenzungsoffiziere*) and were listed as captain (E), major (E), and so on. They were still restricted to certain positions and their promotions were slower than regular officers, but, by 1939, they made up more than one-quarter of all officers on active duty.[1] Despite these measures, however, the *Heer* (as the army was called under the Wehrmacht) was short thousands of officers and many more NCOs by 1936.

Manpower was another matter. The last class to be inducted into the Imperial Army was the class of 1900 (that is, men born in that year). This gave Germany a sizable reserve of men above the age of 35 who already had considerable military training and experience. These were rapidly organized into two paper reserves: the *Landwehr* (men up to age 45) and the *Landsturm* (men over age 45). Both groups were required to register and were subject to recall to active duty or mandatory refresher courses under the defense decree of May 21, 1935.

The first class subject to Hitler's draft was that of 1914. It was originally conscripted for one year, but its term was extended to 24 months before the first draftees were discharged. In this way, the army brought in 300,000 men a year for training, except for the classes of 1916, 1917, and 1918, which provided only 250,000 a year—an indirect result of World War I. When these conscripts were discharged, they were automatically transferred to the Class I Reserve (i.e., the reserve of men who had recently completed active duty).

The Class II Reserve was formed by the men of the ''white years'' of 1901 through 1913, who had not been subjected to the draft when they were young, and who were now untrained and considered too old to draft for two full years. It was planned to call them up for three months each year for three years. Then, after finishing nine months' training over a three-year period, they were to be transferred to the Class I Reserve. In practice, however, few of the Class II Reservists were fully trained when the war began, because so much of the training establishment had to be used for other purposes that had a higher

priority (such as training 18-year-old draftees). Hitler never forgave Fritsch for what he considered this failure.

The Wehrkreise were the executive organs responsible for administering the draft for the German Army. The subdivisions of the Wehrkreise assigned to this task were the *Bezirkskommandos,* which were responsible for keeping draft registration rolls of names and addresses, much like the U.S. Selective Service, except they were administered by older military men, and they were also responsible for keeping and maintaining the personnel files of reserve officers in their area. Each Bezirkskommando had several subordinate *Meldeaemter* (call-up offices), which actually notified the young men that they had been drafted. They were normally accompanied by a representative of the local police. Each *Meldeamt* was responsible for requisitioning horses and transport for the armed forces, and for keeping lists of motorized vehicles, cars, and other modes of transport in case the army needed to requisition them.

TRAINING

The highest training in the army was conducted at Berlin's *Kriegsakademie*—the famous War Academy, which was reopened on August 1, 1934, under the command of Lieutenant General (later General of Infantry) Curt Liebmann. Because of the rich tradition and place in Prussian history that the General Staff occupied, this War Academy had a special place in German history and was considered almost sacred ground to the German Officers' Corps. Naturally Adolf Hitler was on hand to bless it upon its reopening (he was still trying to win the acceptance of the Officers' Corps), as was Field Marshal von Mackensen, General von Blomberg, Beck, and every senior general in the army. Since the chief of the General Staff was responsible for the education of all General Staff officers, the guiding hand behind the resurrected War Academy was that of Ludwig Beck, who gave considerable thought to the selection of students, instructors, the courses of instruction, and all other matters related to the Academy. Unfortunately, despite his intelligence, lofty ideals, and high morals, General Beck was an officer of limited vision. ''Whenever something new had to be done,'' his staff historian recalled, ''he asked himself what had been done in the past.''[2] This statement goes far toward explaining both Beck's opposition to the panzer branch and the deficiencies of the German General Staff during the Nazi era, for the curriculum of the War Academy stressed tactical proficiency, to the neglect (and virtual exclusion) of the larger, strategic questions. In other words, the course of study was similar to that Beck underwent when he was a student. Count Claus von Stauffenberg, one of its graduates in the early Nazi era, later said that too

much emphasis was placed on tactical instruction and not enough on technical difficulties (especially logistics) and problems related to the war economy. There were also no required courses in philosophy, the philosophy of warfare, or strategy. Geography, general history (as separated from military history), and economics were only touched on, and even Clausewitz was neglected. These facts are peculiar when one considers that Beck himself was no simple soldier who grew up in the army and knew nothing else; he was the son of a professor, broadly and well educated, and both intelligent and scholarly. He spoke excellent French, understood other languages, and was proficient in higher mathematics, which was one of his hobbies. Ludwig Beck both knew and understood the literature of philosophy and war and recognized its value and importance; nevertheless, he produced narrowly educated officers. This fact is partially (but not wholly) explained by the fact that the pressure of rearmament and the high demand for General Staff officers forced Beck and Liebmann to shorten the course to three years (later it was reduced to two), followed by the traditional staff ride under Beck's personal supervision. Even so, the courses Beck chose to eliminate as nonessential are as revealing and significant as those he chose to retain.

General Werner von Blomberg was another officer of considerable but highly uneven talents. He did, however, recognize that the course of instruction at the War Academy was too narrow, so, in October 1935, he set up the *Wehrmachtakademie* (the Armed Forces Academy) under General of Infantry Wilhelm Adam, the ''father'' of the mountain troop branch and the former chief of the General Staff (1930–33). Blomberg intended to make the Armed Forces Academy an interservice institute for advanced strategic studies and joint service operations. Beck, however, refused to cooperate, and Blomberg was forced to close the academy after only one class. The War Academy thus remained the highest and most prestigious school in the German armed forces.

In 1935, American Lieutenant Colonel Alfred C. Wedemeyer graduated from the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. At that time, the U.S. and German governments had just concluded a reciprocal exchange agreement that, among other things, allowed two students from each country to attend the other nation's war academy. Wedemeyer was offered the opportunity to go to Berlin, and he jumped at the chance. In his excellent book, *Wedemeyer Reports!* he has left a magnificent account of his thoughts and experiences at the Kriegsakademie, and of the friends and acquaintance he made in Germany, including classmates such as Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Jodl and Captain Claus von Stauffenberg. Wedemeyer's War Academy training is one reason he became chief of the War Plans Department of the U.S. General Staff and advanced from

''light'' colonel to four-star general in less than 10 years. (How this great strategic thinker and authority on the German Army ended up commanding U.S. forces in China is a story that, unfortunately, is beyond the scope of this book.) On the other hand, the Germans did not exercise their option of sending students to Kansas and tactfully implied that they did not think too highly of the U.S. General Staff course.

Wedemeyer would have agreed with this assessment. ''The German pedagogy and curriculum were, in my judgment, superior to our own,'' he wrote after the war.[3] He found that the German War Academy was located in Moabit, an unattractive industrial section of Berlin. Each class began with 100 students and was divided into five ''study halls'' of 20 members each. Since the Prussian and other provincial General Staffs had been merged under the Reichsheer, the old instructional methods of Prussian authoritarianism had been discarded, in favor of techniques more closely associated with southern Germany. Most of the instruction was in the hands of these southern Germans (who had not been educated in the stiff and coldly formal Prussian manner), and encouragement of the uninhibited exchange of views among students and between students and their instructors was certainly more liberal and less dogmatic than would have been the case had the Prussian model been adopted. Here, relationships between junior and senior officers was much closer than outside of the General Staff, and young officers felt free to disagree with older officers who were often two or more grades their superiors in rank, although the proprieties were always observed. This atmosphere, established under Beck (a Hessian), was continued under his successor, Franz Halder, who was a Bavarian. Even criticism of National Socialism was permitted.

Unfortunately, the General Staff course, which flourished in this climate of mutual confidence, consisted of only two parts: the first dealt with command through the regimental level, and the second with command and staff problems at the divisional level and above. During the first year, the students received six hours of lecture each week on tactics, plus four on military history, one in engineering, one on panzer forces, and another on air forces. The rest of the students' time was taken up by group study hall sessions, homework, and individual study. The second year the course remained the same, except an hour's lecture on logistics was added. Finally, in the third year, the student received an entire day's worth of lectures on tactics each week, plus another six hours. Students attended four hours of lectures on military history, plus one hour on logistics and another hour on air forces. ''Each winter, the officers underwent a block of special tactical instruction (called the 'winter study') and each summer he was assigned to a combat arms branch other than his own, to broaden his base of experience.''[4]

Shortly before the outbreak of the war, the General Staff course was shortened to two years because of the desperate need for General Staff officers. By the second half of 1944, the War Academy had been moved from Berlin to Hirschberg, in the Sudeten Mountains of Silesia, and was only a few months long.

Largely because of this course, German mastery of tactical and operational arts on the battlefields of World War II is a generally accepted fact. Had there been a fourth year, dealing with strategy, international relations, geopolitical questions and the problems of industrial and economic warfare, and related issues–coupled perhaps with less tactics and more of these other things in the first three years—events might have worked out much differently than they did. This assumes, of course, that Hitler let his generals practice the strategic art, which is a very big assumption indeed.

At the lower levels, the officer training schools (*Kriegsschulen*) taught officer candidates a much narrower range of tactical skills for the various arms, but with an emphasis on infantry training, which every would-be officer had to undergo. The case of Siegfried Knappe is typical.[5] He graduated from a Leipzig *Gymnasium* (high school) in March 1936 and then was confronted with a choice: enter a university or do his military service. Against the advice of his older sister, Ingeborg, Siegfried decided to get his service out of the way before continuing his education. Before he could join the army, however, he had to undergo six months' labor service in the RAD.

Knappe reported to the Augustus Square in Leipzig on April 4, 1936, along with scores of other boys. They were placed on buses and driven to the village of Burglengenfeld, which was almost on the Czechoslovakian border. The labor service camp included a former villa that had been remodeled to house as many as 160 boys. Each room had four bunks, four lockers, and one table with four chairs.

Wake-up for the camp was at 5:30 A.M. One boy from each room had to go to the mess hall to fetch breakfast, which consisted of a jug of coffee, a bag of hard rolls, and a small amount of jam and butter. The work day began at 6 A.M., with squad drill. Later that day, they were issued an assortment of uniforms for parade, exercising, sports, and work. Lunch lasted an hour and consisted of soup, stew, bread and butter, and coffee or tea. This was followed by a one-hour indoctrination class on the subject of the ''New Greater German Reich.'' Then there was more drill time. After learning the very basics (''left face,'' ''right face,'' and so forth), the boys were issued a spade, which was to be used strictly for exercising and for parades. These spades never touched dirt and had to be kept immaculately clean because there were countless spot inspections.

The first four weeks were taken up by military drill, in which the spade took the place of the rifle. ''An important function of the Labor

Service was to free the Army of having to do this very basic type of training,'' Knappe recalled. ''Everyone who went into the Labor Service would also be drafted into the Army, and we would enter the Army already partially trained.''

The boys were not allowed out of the camp during the first four weeks, but the little base had a library and a recreation hall with ping-pong tables, card tables, and chess sets. There was little free time, however, as the daily schedules were filled by calisthenics, drill, and indoctrination classes. Even so, the first month passed quickly, as the young men acquired a familiarity with military life. Then came the first work day. The boys marched 40 minutes to a strip coal mine, where they removed layers of dirt from veins of coal, loaded the dirt into small tip-bed freight cars, and dug the coal. Lunch was 45 minutes long and consisted of a sandwich of cold cuts and butter, lemonade, and occasionally an apple. They marched back to the camp late in the afternoon, arriving by 5 P.M. Then they washed, ate dinner, and had an assembly, which featured either singing or a history lesson. They also did kitchen or guard duty periodically, just like in the military.

''One of our first days at work proved to be especially tiring because the weather was very hot and humid,'' Knappe recalled. ''The work spade had worn blisters on my hands, and sweat poured from my body, making it extremely desirable to gnats, flies, and mosquitoes.'' Then his Gruppenfuehrer appeared and inspected their parade spades, which had been stacked like rifles. ''You call these clean?'' he bellowed, and kicked them over into the mud.

''I gulped, knowing that mine had been clean, and I had strategically placed it so I would know which one was mine. Now they all lay like identical match sticks covered with mud,'' Knappe recalled. ''Tonight, we will polish spades from 10 o'clock until midnight. And we will do it every night until all these spades are clean,'' Brandt announced. When the assembly began, the young Leipziger recalled, ''My muscles ached, my blistered hands hurt, and I had someone else's grimy spade. As I scrubbed and scraped with wet sand, Inge's face appeared before me, laughing in an 'I told you so' manner.''

The boys were free on weekends, from 4 P.M. on Saturday until 10 P.M. on Sunday. Knappe and his friends took a train to nearby cities, where they visited historical and cultural sites, cathedrals, and museums; had lunch in a restaurant; and perhaps went to a movie or a dance, looking for girls. These outings were financed by their parents; the Labor Service only paid them half a mark per day, which was barely enough to cover snacks and incidentals. In addition, they received a five-day furlough home in June.

Knappe was one the 10 percent from his camp (and one of 10,000 young men) selected to represent the RAD and parade for the Fuehrer

at Reichs Party Day (*Reichsparteitag*) in Nuremberg on September 8. Only the taller boys were selected, and they practiced drilling for a month. Then they were transported to Nuremberg, where a tent city had been set up. Even though they could barely see the reviewing stand, Knappe recalled:

> We felt 10 feet tall and indestructible! Even among the many thousands of others, I felt that all eyes in the reviewing stand were on me. This was pageantry of the highest order, and it inspired enormous national pride in us. It was a jubilant extravaganza with the unmistakable message that Germany was being reborn. I felt extremely proud.

After the rally, Knappe returned to Burglengenfeld, was discharged from the Reich Labor Service on September 24, and returned to Leipzig. Three weeks later, he took the train to Jena, 40 miles away, to begin his career as a soldier in the 24th Artillery Regiment. ''For two years our newspapers had been full of stories about the technological advances that had been achieved in mechanizing our modern Army, including the artillery,'' Knappe remembered, ''and I had volunteered for the artillery with visions of driving self-propelled mechanized artillery.'' To his dismay, he found himself in a horse artillery unit.

''Suddenly the artillery lost all its glamour and appeal. Instead of driving massive mechanized artillery, I would be driving horses. I might as well be in the Kaiser's artillery.... I wanted to turn around and go back home.''

This, of course, he could not do. The next morning he was awakened by a whistle at 5 A.M. and had his first taste of stable duty. His first military experience was shoveling manure. This was to be his job every morning before breakfast. Then, after breakfast, he met Sergeant Krall, the German equivalent of a drill sergeant. ''It is my responsibility to make soldiers out of the sad specimen I see before me,'' he said through clenched teeth. ''Obviously, they expect miracles of me. But I am going to do it if I have to work you day and night for the next 365 days. From the looks of you, that is what it is going to take.''

Basic training in the Wehrmacht in 1936 was somewhat similar to American basic training. As artillery soldiers, Knappe and his comrades underwent only six weeks of infantry basic training (as opposed to 12 months for infantry troops). They learned infantry tactics, how to handle and clean rifles, how to parade, how to throw hand grenades, and how to operate machine guns. During this phase, the day usually ended at 10 P.M., when the recruits fell into bed, nearly exhausted. Then, around December 1, they began their three months of basic artillery training, for which they were divided into two groups: *fahrers* (horse handlers) and *kanoniers* (gunners).[6] After they learned the basics,

most of the men continued with gunnery training and practice sessions, which lasted the rest of the year. Because he had a high school diploma, Knappe was selected for communications training as a radiotelephone operator for the battery's forward observers. Their big maneuvers took place in the summer, when they went to Jueterborg, a military facility near Berlin, where they could fire live ammunition. While here, Knappe and his division paraded for Hitler and Mussolini. ''As participants, unfortunately, all we saw was dust,'' Gunner Knappe remembered. ''Nearly 300 horses and 100 cannon wheels raised so much dust that we not only could not see, we could barely breathe!''

On weekends, Knappe and his friends spent time in Jena, which readily accepted them. Then, in late February 1937, he and three other soldiers—all of them gymnasium graduates—were invited to become officer candidates. Knappe accepted and immediately began his training in ''correct behavior'' (that is, how to behave in various social situations, how to act at mess, and so on). His military training was also intensified, with an emphasis on tactics, and he began to learn the forward observer's and battery officer's jobs. The candidates continued their duties as enlisted men and helped the farmers with their harvests in the second half of July. ''It was fun, it was a nice break in the routine for us, and it was a great help for the farmers ... we thoroughly enjoyed helping the farmers out,'' Knappe recalled. ''They were very appreciative, and they fed us extremely well.''

In the late 1930s, there were four grades of officer candidates: *Fahnenjunker-gefreiter* (equivalent to corporal); *Fahnenjunker-unteroffizier* (equivalent to sergeant); *Fahnrich* (officer candidate) and *Oberfahnrich* (senior officer candidate or ''almost an officer''). Candidates could be promoted to Fahnenjunker-Unteroffizier before beginning their intensive officer training at a Kriegsschule. Successful candidates were promoted to Fahnrich about halfway through their training. Knappe was promoted to Fahnenjunker-gefreiter on June 1, 1937, and to Fahnenjunker-unteroffizier on September 1. After a 10-day furlough, he reported to the War Academy at Potsdam in mid-October, to being his officer's training.

The barracks at Potsdam were divided into suites, with four candidates per suite. All four men in each suite were from different branches of the service. Each suite was divided into a large study room with four desks and a bedroom with four beds, four lockers, and four washing facilities. There were approximately 1,000 students in the school at any one time, and there were four schools in Germany. The Potsdam school was divided into two groups (500 students), and each group had 16 platoons of 32 men each.

One measure of the quality of the school and the quality of the training the young men received is the caliber of the officers responsible for

their training. The school commandant was Colonel Wilhelm Wetzel, who commanded the 255th Infantry Division, the V Corps, and the LXVI Corps in World War II. He ended the war as a general of infantry, commanding Wehrkreis X. Knappe's group commander was Lieutenant Colonel Erwin Rommel, who would one day earn fame as the ''Desert Fox.'' His book, *Infantry in the Attack*, was then being used as a textbook in the course. Knappe's platoon leader was Major Erwin Kahsnitz, who, as a colonel, was commanding the elite Grossdeutschland Fuesilier Regiment when he was killed in action on July 20, 1943. He was posthumously promoted to major general.[7]

All candidates were treated as infantry, and the mission of the academy was to teach them all how to lead an infantry battalion in combat. The training began immediately and continued without a break until Christmas. They studied topography, map reading, engineering, the construction and demolition of bridges, basic artillery, drill, parade, physical education, Luftwaffe coordination, and horseback riding. They spent six hours each day in the classroom and three in the field, and had a major exam every week. The most important subject was tactics, which counted more than all of the other subjects combined. In their tactical problems, there was no single ''school solution''; the candidates had to formulate, defend, and execute their own plans, and their success was based on how well they did it. They all got the chance to ''play'' battalion commander, as well as serve as company commander and in various staff positions. They also spent a great deal of time studying military history (mostly the Prussian battles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and often took trips (now called ''staff rides'') to the actual battlefields. One trip to East Prussia lasted two weeks. They also studied the tactics of Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, and Frederick the Great, and the battles of ancient Greeks and Romans. They learned how to handle barbed wire, antitank mines, dynamite (for demolitions), and various types of machine guns, and they participated in sports, including swimming, highdiving, boxing, fencing, horseback riding, running, and tennis. In addition, the school owned some small sailing boats, and everyone learned how to sail.

''Our lives were quite pleasant at Kriegsschule Potsdam,'' Fahnenjunker Knappe recalled. Their training was excellent, interesting, and challenging. Their mess hall was like a cafeteria; the food was simple but good, and usually consisted of meat, potatoes, vegetables, and bread. The hall was used only for the noon meal. Each room was issued a two-pound loaf of *kommissbrot* (army bread) every other day, and they were issued butter, jam, and coffee every morning. Dinner was dispensed from the mess hall and eaten in the suite. It consisted of liverwurst or cheese, butter, and bread.

In addition to their military training, they received training in the social graces as well. They often had formal dances, to which the daughters of older officers and the local gentry were invited. They were held in large ballrooms, with live orchestras, and dance classes were provided for those who needed them.

After a Christmas furlough, training resumed in the second week of January 1938. Just before graduation, all of the candidates were asked if they would like to join the Luftwaffe. Not enough candidates volunteered, so several were drafted into the air force. Knappe graduated on July 2, 1938, and returned to his unit as an Oberfahnrich, to complete his specialty training. Since no officer candidate could be assigned to a base where he had served as an enlisted man, Knappe was assigned to I Battalion of the 24th Artillery, which supported the 18th Infantry Regiment at Plauen. Those who had not performed well enough to earn a commission were returned to their regiments as sergeants. Knappe, however, finished 24th out of 4,000 and received his commission on September 1. He ended the war as a major of the General Staff and as operations officer of the LVI Panzer Corps in the Battle of Berlin.

Although Knappe was an exceptional young man, the training he had received to this point in his career was typical. Like his superiors up through the ranks of corps commander, he had received the best military training available anywhere in the world. Also, like most of his peers, he had faith in the peaceful goals and ideals of the Fuehrer; he had no idea that he would be required to use what he had learned in the near future.

NOTES

1. Angolia and Schlict, pp. 40–41.
2. Nicholas Reynolds, *Treason Was No Crime* (1976), pp. 72–73.
3. Albert C. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* (1958), p. 50.
4. Messerschmidt, *Effectiveness*, pp. 244–45.
5. This section is taken from the unpublished manuscript ''At What Cost!'' by Siegfried Knappe and Ted Brusaw (hereafter cited as Knappe and Brusaw). A somewhat abbreviated version was later published as *Soldat* by Crown Publishing Company, New York, 1992.
6. Each gun was served by nine gunners: a gun leader (normally a sergeant or corporal), five *kanonier* (gunners), and three *fahrer* (horse handlers).
7. Keilig, p. 164.

CHAPTER VII

THE LUFTWAFFE TAKES THE WRONG PATH

ORGANIZING THE LUFTWAFFE

Despite outward appearances and its propaganda image, the Luftwaffe had numerous deep-seated flaws and faced many problems. As of March 1935, when Goebbels proclaimed its existence to the world, only 800 of its 2,500 aircraft were combat-ready, and not one met the requirements of the Knauss study. The aircraft of the Risk Air Force were almost useless, and the rest of the Luftwaffe and the German aviation industry had financial and technical difficulties, were short of raw materials and skilled laborers, lacked sound management and clear direction, and formed a curious mixture of military and civilian departments. The Third Reich had, in short, produced a hastily organized air force in which quantity prevailed over quality.[1]

The man who set out to make a modern air force out of this jumble was Walter Wever, a military genius who, at the age of 46, became the chief of the Air Command Office and, in reality, the first chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe in 1934.

Wever was born in Posen, East Prussia (later Podzan, Poland), in 1887. He joined the Imperial Army as a *Fahnenjunker* in the infantry at age 18 and distinguished himself as a platoon leader in the first year of World War I; then, in 1915, he was promoted to captain and given a staff job. In early 1917, he was handpicked to join the staff of Ludendorff and Hindenburg, where he held responsibility far in excess of his rank. He was partially responsible, for example, for originating the concept of the elastic defense, which broke the back of the French offensive at Chemin des Dames. After the war, he joined the Truppenamt, where he earned the respect of Hans von Seeckt, despite his previous association with the Hindenburg-Ludendorff duo. By 1932, he

was a full colonel and in charge of the training branch of the Troop Office. When he left for the Luftwaffe, Werner von Blomberg moaned that he was losing a future chief of the General Staff of the Army. Wever was promoted to major general in 1934 and to lieutenant general the following year.

In addition to his great intelligence and tremendous grasp of technical details, Wever possessed an almost unique gift for getting along with everybody, while simultaneously getting his own way on almost every issue. He therefore was able to reduce the impact of the Goering-Milch feud on the evolving Luftwaffe, while the air force developed along the lines envisioned by Walter Wever.

His first step was to organize the Luftwaffe territorially. Initially, six Higher Air Offices (*Gehobene Luftaemtern*) had been established to coordinate the development of the infant air force. In 1935, under Wever, these were upgraded to air district commands (*Luftkreis-kommando*), which performed roughly the same functions that the Wehrkreise served for the army. Luftkreiskommando VII was added on April 1, 1937. Table 7.1 shows the regions controlled by the Luftkreiskommandos, their headquarters, and their commanders.

Table 7.1
Luftwaffe Territorial Organization, 1935
(The Luftkriesekommandos)

Luftkries-kommando	Headquarters	Areas of Responsibility
I	Koenigsberg	East Prussia
II	Berlin	Pomerania, Brandenburg
III	Dresden	Saxony, Thuringen, Silesia
IV	Muenster	Schleswig-Holstein, Provincial Saxony, Oldenburg Mecklenberg
V	Munich	Bavaria, Wuerttemberg, Baden Hessen-Nassau, southern Rhineland, Hesse
VI	Kiel	Air-Sea Units

Note:
Commanders: I: Major General Karl Schweickhard; II: General of Fliers Leonard Kaupisch; III: General of Fliers Edmund Wachenfeld; IV: General of Fliers Hans Halm; V: General of Fliers Karl Eberth (later Colonel Hugo Sperrle); VI: Lieutenant General Konrad Zander. Luftkrieskommando VII (Colonel Helmuth Felmy) at Brunswick was added on April 1, 1937.
Sources:
Georg Tessin, *Formationsgeschichte der Wehrmacht, 1933–1939: Stabe und Truppenteile des Heeres und der Luftwaffe* (1959); Albert Seaton, *The German Army, 1933–1945* (1981), pp. 72–73.

It is interesting to note that four of the six district commanders were former General Staff officers recruited from the army's retired list: Lieutenant Generals Leonhard Kaupisch, Edmund Wachenfeld, Hans Halm, and Karl Eberth. All were soon promoted to general of fliers. Conrad Zander, a retired rear admiral, joined the Luftwaffe as a major general on March 1, 1935, but he was promoted to lieutenant general a month later. He was promoted to general of fliers on October 1, 1936.[2]

Tactically, the smallest aviation formation in the Luftwaffe was the squadron (*Staffel*), which normally had 9 to 12 aircraft and was commanded by a lieutenant or a captain. The squadron flew in *schwaerme* (half-squadrons), *ketten* (sections of three or four aircraft), or *rotten* (pairs). The *gruppe* (group) was the basic combat unit of the Luftwaffe for both operational and administrative purposes, and the largest that normally housed itself in a single airfield. It usually included 30 to 36 aircraft and was commanded by a major or lieutenant colonel.

The wing (*Geschwader*) consisted of three groups and sometimes more. It had 100 to 120 aircraft and was usually commanded by a colonel. The various types of wings included the *Jagdgeschwader* (single-engine fighter wing, abbreviated JG), the bomber wing (*Kampfgeschwader* or KG), the *Stukageschwader* (Stuka or dive-bomber wing or StG), and the *Zerstoerergeschwader* (literally ''destroyer wing'' or ZG), which was a twin-engine fighter wing. A *Lehrgeschwader* (a training or demonstration wing or LG) could include any kind of aircraft or combinations of aircraft.

The wing gave identification to the formations and was expressed in Arabic numbers. The 1st Fighter Wing was JG 1, the 2nd Dive Bomber Wing was StG 2, and so forth. Transport wings were listed as bomber wings ''for special purposes.'' KG 100 z.b.V. (zur besondere Verwendung—for special purposes) would, therefore, indicate the 100th Transport Wing. Groups were then listed by Roman numerals, and squadrons by Arabic numbers again. Therefore, III/KG 3 would indicate III Group, 3rd Bomber Wing; 1,II/JG 77 would be the 1st Squadron, II Group, 77th [Single-Engine] Fighter Wing; and so forth.

Above the wing level, Wever planned to establish air divisions, air corps, and air fleets. Appendix 5 gives the strengths of the various Luftwaffe units and the ranks of their commanders.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT UNDER WEVER

Creating a territorial administrative and operational framework for the Luftwaffe was a fairly simple exercise for General Wever, compared with the task of developing an air doctrine. The first step in Wever's thought process was to determine what kind of war the new service would be called on to fight. To do this, he read *Mein Kampf*

from cover to cover—a remarkable achievement in itself. He learned that Hitler wanted no war of revenge against France or Britain and that the Soviet Union was National Socialism's greatest enemy.

Wever believed that it was far more economical to destroy an enemy's weapons at the source, rather than on the battlefield. He therefore wanted a bomber that could reach Russia's industrial heartland and beyond, even as far as the regions east of the Ural Mountains, 1,500 miles away. This would require it to have about five times the range of existing bombers. Major General Wilhelm Wimmer, the chief of the Technical Office, agreed wholeheartedly with Wever's concept and the specification requirements were sent to the German aviation industry. They began to design the airplane Wever wanted (dubbed the ''Ural Bomber'') as soon as they got over the shock.

Wever, however, was anything but an uncritical follower of Doucet, the aviation theorist who believed that air power alone could decide a future war. In November 1935, during his inaugural address to the Air War Academy, General Wever set the main air priority for the Luftwaffe as close cooperation with the army and navy against the enemy armed forces. He also demanded that the Luftwaffe aim at bringing the enemy's war production to a halt, thus adding a strong secondary strategic mission to the primary tactical mission.[3]

The basic publication, in which Wever and his associate, Lieutenant General Helmut Wilberg, set down air command principles and the priority of missions and targets for the aircraft, was *Luftwaffen Dienstverschrift #16* (*Luftwaffe Service Manual #16*), which was first printed in 1936 and revised several times. The priority of missions was: (1) actions to eliminate enemy air forces; (2) operations in support of friendly ground and naval forces; and (3) operations against hostile sources of military power (that is, strategic targets). ''From the outset of hostilities,'' paragraph 103 stated, ''warfare must be conducted against the enemy's air forces.'' Later, the manual added: ''Aggressive operations against the hostile air forces *on the ground* and airborne over hostile territory are considered as the most effective method of home defense'' (italics added).[4]

None of this particularly interested Hermann Goering, who was busy with his mistress, art collection, huge toy train set, and luxurious lifestyle. Only two facts seemed to concern him: Wever was doing his job and (unlike Milch) was not plotting to replace Goering as supreme commander of the Luftwaffe. The Number Two Nazi, therefore, only rarely appeared at the Air Command Office and, when he did, Wever knew what to do with him. As Wever saw it, Goering's most important function in the development of the Luftwaffe was the procurement of funds. When Minister of Economics Dr. Hjalmar Schacht or the finance ministry turned down a request for money (which was often), Wever

simply turned it over to Goering, who would summon up one of his periodic bursts of energy and head for the Reichschancellery. ''Here it is!'' Goering would shout later, when he returned with Hitler's order, approving the funding request. ''The Fuehrer is surprised that we're so modest. He expected us to ask for a lot more. Incidentally, once and for all, money is no object. Remember that!''[5] Then he would leave and sometimes not be seen again for weeks. Small wonder Goering was popular with his senior and General Staff officers in the early years of the Luftwaffe. It would be difficult *not* to like that kind of a boss. In fact, between January 1933 and August 1939, Germany spent some 64 billion Reichsmarks on rearmament (about one-seventh of the Reich's gross national product). About 40 percent of this amount went to the Luftwaffe—a very high percentage, when one considers the requirements of the army and the navy.[6] No doubt about it: the Luftwaffe was on the right track at the end of 1935.

In 1936, the German aviation industry produced two promising prototypes for the strategic four-engine (''Ural'') bomber: the Junkers 89 (Ju-89) and the Dornier 19 (Do-19). The Dornier had the range Wever wanted (1,800 miles, versus 1,240 for the Ju-89), but both lacked speed. Wever therefore rejected both airplanes and sent the designers back to the drawing boards with a demand to design new bombers with greater horsepower. Research and development on the four-engine strategic bomber continued at an accelerated pace under Wever's leadership. Meanwhile, the initial objections of Hermann Goering and Erhard Milch to the four-engine bomber were turned into reserved support, thanks to Wever's diplomacy and ability to persuade.

In other areas of aircraft production, the Luftwaffe was doing even better, although the situation was by no means universally good. A ''new generation'' of German aircraft had been accepted or were in an advanced stage of development, and the German manufacturing plants were training workers and retooling to put the new airplanes into series production. These aircraft included the Bf-109, also known as the Me-109,[7] a single-engine airplane that would be the standard German fighter throughout the war. It began coming out of the assembly plants in 1937. The best fighter in the world in the late 1938, the Me-109 could fly at 400 mph at 20,000 feet and had a range of 365 to 460 miles, depending on the model. Armament varied considerably, also depending on the model. The early Me-109B, for example, had three 7.92-millimeter Rheinmetall-Borsig MG 17 machine guns mounted above the engine and firing through the propeller hub. The Me-109C-2 had five MG 17 machine guns: two on the wings, two firing from above the engine through the propeller blades, and one firing through the propeller hub. Later models had more firepower. The Me-109G-6, for example, had a 30-millimeter machine gun, two 20-millimeter machine guns,

and two 15-millimeter machine guns. Many of the G and H models also carried 210-millimeter rocket tubes under their wings, instead of their wing guns.[8] All in all, it was the most formidable aircraft of its time and destroyed more enemy airplanes than any other fighter of World War II.

The Junkers 87 Stuka dive-bomber, with its distinctive inverted gull-shaped wings, was considered a revolutionary ground support aircraft, which it was in the 1930s and early 1940s. It was characterized by its remarkable bombing accuracy, and it had a tremendous effect on the morale of the troops it attacked. The characteristics that later negated its usefulness in the West after June 1940 were not considered too important in 1936. It was slow, especially when recovering from a dive, and its speed was further cut by its exterior bomb racks and non-retractable landing gear. It would prove to be vulnerable against later-generation Allied fighters when they were flown by well-trained pilots, but this would not become relevant for some time. The Stuka would be used with success on the Eastern Front until the end of the war.

Other German airplanes were less remarkable. The Ju-52 tri-engine low-wing monoplane transport was good and already in production. The Me-110 twin-engine fighter was designed to escort bombers, but it would prove to be dangerously slow—only 360 mph at 20,000 feet. It also lacked maneuverability. The two medium bombers (the Dornier 17 [Do-17] and the Heinkel 111 [He-111]) were light, twin-engine airplanes that were not particularly good for strategic bombing missions. Their range was limited and their bomb load (or ''payload'') was small: 1 ton for the Do-17 and 1.5 tons for the He-111, compared with 10 tons for some of the Allied bombers in 1944–45. Had Wever remained in charge, these aircraft undoubtedly would have been replaced by better bombers and fighters. By 1936, the Ju-88 ''Wonder Bomber'' was already under development, as were other airplanes. Had Walter Wever lived longer, the Luftwaffe likely would have continued to develop as successfully as it did under his remarkable reign. Unfortunately for the Third Reich, however, he did not.

Walter Wever's abilities as a General Staff officer and diplomat exceeded those of Walter Wever, the pilot, by a wide margin. He had fewer than 200 hours in his logbook on June 3, 1936, when he flew to Dresden, to deliver a speech to a group of Luftwaffe officer cadets. He was in a hurry to return to Berlin, to attend the funeral of General Karl von Litzman, a hero of World War I, so he skipped the preflight inspection of his He-70, an aircraft he had flown only twice before. Skipping the preflight inspection is a dangerous thing to do and has been responsible for the deaths of men and women who were much better pilots than Wever. The ensuing flight was short, because Wever had not noticed that his aileron lock was still engaged. The Heinkel's

tanks were full of highly explosive aviation fuel when it abruptly turned nose down, crashed near the end of the runway, and exploded into a huge ball of flame, killing the general instantly. Hermann Goering broke down and cried like a baby when he heard the news, as well he should, for Wever was the one indispensable man in the history of the Luftwaffe. He was succeeded as chief of the General Staff by Lieutenant General Albert Kesselring.

CHANGING STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND COMMAND FRAGMENTATION

Kesselring, the son of a Bavarian schoolmaster, was a major factor, both positively and negatively, in the history of the Luftwaffe. He was born on November 20, 1885, and grew up in Wunsiedel. Because his father and mother recognized the value of an excellent education, he attended the Latin School at Bayreuth, and would impress almost everyone who met him for the rest of his life as a highly cultured and polished individual. Why he chose a military career is not known but, almost as soon as he graduated from Bayreuth, he joined in the 2nd Bavarian Foot Artillery Regiment as a Fahnenjunker on July 20, 1904. In the 1910, he trained as a balloon observer and eventually became the adjutant of the balloon battalion at Metz.

Young Albert went to war with his regiment in 1914 and spent the first half of the conflict on the Western Front. In 1916, he was promoted to captain and transferred to the artillery staff of Crown Prince Rupprecht's Bavarian 6th Army in Flanders. In early 1917, Kesselring was named directly to the General Staff, without having to attend the war-shortened two months' course at Sedan—a mark of extreme distinction in the Imperial Army. Kesselring spent the last two years of the war in General Staff positions on the Eastern and Western Fronts. After the war, he joined the Reichswehr and was involved in the establishment of the secret German air training base in the Soviet Union. Then, in 1932, he assumed command of the 4th Artillery Regiment at Dresden—a prized appointment that led to his promotion to colonel later that year. In October 1933, however, his career took a radical turn: somewhat against his will, he was transferred to the secret Luftwaffe.

In his new service, Kesselring was responsible for budgeting, housing, construction, food, and clothing. Since the Luftwaffe was being built almost from scratch, this was an extremely important assignment, and he carried it out with considerable skill. His success did not go unrewarded: he was promoted to major general in 1934, to lieutenant general in 1936, and to the post of chief of the General Staff on June 9, 1936. As such, he soon ran into trouble with Erhard Milch, the state secretary for aviation.

As we have read, Milch coveted the jobs of air minister and supreme commander of the Luftwaffe, both of which were held by Hermann Goering. Milch was also a sensitive, jealous, and insecure man, who felt that the chief of the General Staff should be subordinate to Erhard Milch in all things. Albert Kesselring, however, had no intention of bowing to Milch in any way. The initial shot in this war between the generals was fired when Milch demanded that Major Hans Jeschonnek, a training group commander, be court-martialed because of a series of accidents for which Milch held him responsible. Kesselring promoted Jeschonnek instead. As a result, the state secretary and the chief of the General Staff were soon at each other's throats—a situation that would continue to plague the Luftwaffe for years. Milch plotted and conspired against Kesselring, and Kesselring responded by trying to limit Milch's authority to strictly civilian aviation matters. Once he even demanded that the state secretary be court-martialed for high treason, because he thought that Milch gave away too many Luftwaffe secrets during a state visit to England.

The air forces generals generally sided with Kesselring and looked upon the much younger Milch as little more than a civilian in uniform. To them, Milch was a intriguer and manipulator who filled his ministerial appointments with ''yes-men'' and who owed his own position to political considerations. They had no intentions of becoming yes-men for someone who did not even have General Staff training. Milch's technological knowledge was superior to theirs, of course, but the bright newcomers rapidly applied themselves to their new careers and were quickly closing this gap. In addition, the straight-laced generals thought, Milch's personal life was hardly above reproach (he was a womanizer), and there were those whispers about his Jewish ancestry.

Hermann Goering should have stepped in and ended the conflict between Milch and the General Staff, but he encouraged it instead. Goering had reason to fear both sides in the power struggle. Not a professional officer himself, he had only briefly commanded a fighter wing 18 years before, had no General Staff training, and had virtually no technological understanding of modern military aviation. In short, literally dozens of officers had better qualifications for commanding the Luftwaffe than he. But with Milch and the chief of the General Staff each plotting against the other, neither could threaten Goering's own position. Goering was thus practicing the old political principle of divide and rule, and it worked; however, it did irreparable damage to the Luftwaffe in the process.

Meanwhile, Albert Kesselring played a major role in the development of the Luftwaffe. During his relatively short tenure, he accelerated air force base and airfield construction, and he helped create of the German parachute school, which was set up at Stendal, 78 miles

west of Berlin. Kesselring, however, proved less farsighted than his predecessor, Wever. In early 1937, he recommended that the four-engine bomber project be cancelled because it was too costly in terms of fuel and raw materials, especially critical metals.

Interestingly enough, this was one of the few matters upon which Milch and Kesselring agreed (although after the war, Milch tried to pin the sole blame for the project's cancellation on Kesselring). Kesselring and Milch were opposed by Colonel Kurt Pflugbeil, the chief of the bomber inspectorate, and Colonel Paul Deichmann, chief of the operations branch of the Luftwaffe General Staff. Deichmann was especially outspoken and even secured an appointment with Hermann Goering, in an effort to save the four-engine bomber. Milch, however, denounced Deichmann's farsighted arguments as ''pure fantasy'' and told Goering that he had a choice—produce 1,000 four-engine bombers or several thousand two-engine bombers.[9] ''The Fat One'' did not think about it too long. ''The Fuehrer asks me how many bombers I have, not what type,'' he said, and rejected Deichmann's arguments. ''And Milch personally ensured that Dornier's and Junkers' prototypes were consigned to the scrap-heap,'' Becker recorded later.[10] Both airplanes were listed as ready for testing at the time. As a result, Nazi Germany never did produce a strategic bomber. During the war, the Luftwaffe had no suitable airplane with which to bomb the Soviet Union's far-flung factories, or to attack Anglo-American convoys or naval forces in the Atlantic, or to cooperate with the U-boats, which might have won the war for Nazi Germany with a little more help. Meanwhile, the Anglo-Saxons devastated Germany's cities—with four-engine bombers.

Kesselring soon tired of the constant bickering and political infighting with Milch and stepped down as chief of staff in 1937. Goering offered the post of chief of the Air General Staff to two capable army officers, Franz Halder and Alfred Jodl, but both turn it down. Neither wanted to work with (that is, against) Milch. Finally, Goering turned to Hans-Juergen Stumpff, the chief of the Personnel Office. Stumpff never wanted the post and indeed would only accept an interim appointment. Also, he was too easy to get along with and apparently was not a strong enough counterweight against Milch to suit Goering. Hermann, therefore, reorganized the Air Ministry into military and civilian branches. The General Staff was to be in control of the High Command of the Luftwaffe (OKL), but Milch would remain inspector general of the Luftwaffe and would retain control of the Central Branch and the inspectorates. This organizational structure left Milch with influence in, but little control over, the military aspects of German aviation. It was a fundamentally unworkable situation that festered for years, almost until the end of the Luftwaffe.

The air force's internal situation deteriorated even further in 1937 and 1938, when Goering began removing offices from the control of

the Air Ministry and the General Staff. Since they were now directly under the supervision of the minister himself, and since Goering made absolutely no attempt to supervise them, they became, in reality, independent agencies, which fragmented the command apparatus of the Luftwaffe. Before 1935, the organizational structure of the Luftwaffe provided for only one center of power in the air force: Milch. After this time, there were two: Milch and Wever (later Kesselring). By January 1938, however, there were no less than five more or less independent sources of power in the Luftwaffe: Milch, Stumpff, and the chiefs of the Personnel Office, the Office of the Chief of Air Defense, and the Technical Office. In the cases of the first two, this made no difference. They were both headed by competent General Staff officers who knew what they were doing. The Technical Office was another matter entirely.

Hermann Goering never did particularly like Wilhelm Wimmer. In June 1936, he replaced Wimmer as chief of the Technical Office with his old friend, Ernst Udet.

It was the beginning of the end for the Luftwaffe.

Ernst Udet was a military adventurer who, in another time, probably would have been a pirate or a mercenary. He was a holder of the *Pour le Merite* and, with 62 kills, was the leading German ace to survive World War I. Udet had served with Goering in 1918, when the latter was commander of the famous Richthofen Wing, and the two became fast friends. After the armistice, Udet smashed his airplane and returned to Munich, where he worked as an automobile mechanic and stunt pilot. He soon tired of the Weimar Republic, however, and moved to South America in 1925. Then he followed a series of adventures in which he flew explorers in East Africa, conducted a barnstorming tour of the United States, worked as a stunt pilot for a Hollywood movie company, and flew on a hunting trip to the Arctic. He did not return to Germany until after Hitler came to power.

Nothing in Udet's background or education qualified him for higher-level General Staff work, and he also lacked patience, maturity, mental toughness, and self-discipline. Nevertheless, Hermann Goering persuaded him to join the Luftwaffe (as a colonel on special assignment) in mid-1935. His first important post was inspector of fighters and dive-bombers, which he assumed in early 1936, succeeding Ritter Robert von Greim. He was promoted all too rapidly: to major general (1937), lieutenant general (1938), general of fliers (1940), and colonel general (July 19, 1940). On June 9, 1936, only four months after he took over the fighter and dive-bomber inspectorate, Ernst Udet was named chief of the Technical Office, which became the Office of Supply and Procurement in 1938. This agency was responsible for aircraft and weapons development, procurement, and supply for the entire

Luftwaffe. Udet converted it from a relatively efficient organization into a hopeless bureaucracy, in which Udet himself attempted to direct no less than 26 department heads, in between wild parties, drunken sprees, and ''dates'' with his mistresses. Udet also routinely drank to excess, took drugs with depressing side effects, and went on diets during which he ate only meat. Department chiefs were often unable to see their boss for weeks at a time and the most important decisions were often made by default—or not made at all.

Udet's superior should have been aware of all of this, but he was not; he was Hermann Goering, which effectively meant that Udet had no supervision at all. The infrequent conferences these two ''Old Eagles'' had were usually ''bull sessions,'' in which they reminisced about the days when they were young, trim lieutenants in the old ''Flying Circus.'' One only had to look at their waists to see that those days were long gone. Under such mismanagement, the development of the ''Second Generation'' of Luftwaffe aircraft floundered.

Hermann Goering himself took little interest in such mundane matters as what the pilots would fly in the future; he was too busy living for today. After 1934, his energy diminished greatly, possibly because he was taking drugs again. This time it was paracodeine, a mild morphine narcotic. (By the end of 1937, he was up to 10 pills a day.) He had also met and fallen in love with Emmy Sonnemann, a generous, big-hearted blonde who was an actress with the Weimar National Theater. Their affair became so open and scandalous that Adolf Hitler himself is said to have ordered Hermann to end it or marry the woman. Goering married her on April 10, 1935. Typically, their wedding was the largest and most ostentatious in the history of the Third Reich. Tickets sold for $8.50 each (a high price in 1935), and the value of the wedding gifts extended into the millions. These were given by government ministers, NSDAP friends, industrialists who were trying to bribe him, foreign officials, and the employees of the air ministry. The latter had their paychecks docked to provide Hermann and Emmy with expensive ''gifts.'' Dr. Goebbels uncharitably commented that he did not know what all the fuss was about, since this was not exactly a first-night performance for Frau Goering.

The second Mrs. Goering was as different from the first as could be imagined. Karin, a fanatical Nazi who died of cancer in 1931, had constantly encouraged Hermann to push himself and work harder for the Fuehrer. Emmy told him that he worked too hard and constantly encouraged him to take it easier. Goering took this advice and lived the life of luxury on his 100,000-acre estate, where he ballooned to more than 320 pounds. Periodically he would become disgusted with his weight and begin a program of diet and exercise. More often than not the diet would end that same night, during a midnight raid on one

of his refrigerators, during which time he gorged himself on his favorite dish (blinis with caviar, smothered with real whipped cream and chased down with champagne or expensive wine). With his huge estate, his indulgent wife, his natural love of hunting and luxury, his laziness and his drug habit, Goering had little time for the air force, except to make sure he remained in power as supreme commander of the Luftwaffe.

Hans-Juergen Stumpff, a congenial Pomeranian and veteran General Staff officer, tried to straighten out the organizational mess, but failed, because neither Milch nor Goering were willing to cooperate with him. To his great relief, he was succeeded in early 1939 by Hans Jeschonnek, who became the fourth chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe in four years. Stumpff took over the Office of Air Defense and went on to achieve distinction during World War II as an air fleet commander.

In naming Hans Jeschonnek chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, Goering had carried the principle of divide and rule to an extreme degree. Jeschonnek, it will be recalled, was the officer whose court-martial Milch demanded when Kesselring was chief of the General Staff. This appointment virtually ensured that there would be no cooperation between Milch and the General Staff, and indeed there was none.

Jeschonnek was born on April 9, 1899, in Hohensalza, East Prussia (now Inowroclaw, Poland), the son of an assistant schoolmaster. At the age of 15 years and 6 months, Hans volunteered for service in World War I. He attended the elite cadet school at Gross-Lichterfelde, received his commission, underwent pilot training, and shot down two enemy airplanes before the armistice was signed. In 1919, he joined the 6th Cavalry Regiment in Upper Silesia and saw action against the Poles. Accepted into the Reichswehr, he joined the staff of Captain Kurt Student's Inspectorate of Arms and Equipment in 1923. This bureau was in reality part of the camouflaged air branch of the Reichswehr. In this post, Jeschonnek studied aircraft development in foreign countries; then he underwent clandestine General Staff training and graduated at the head of his class in 1928. Next he went to work for Colonel Helmuth Felmy, who was in charge of inspecting undercover air units in the Reichswehr. When Hitler took power on January 30, 1933, Jeschonnek was named adjutant to Erhard Milch, the new state secretary for the Reichs Commissariat of Aviation. The two became good friends; then, suddenly, they became bitter enemies. The reason is unknown.[11] In any case, Jeschonnek was abruptly transferred to the 152nd Bomber Wing in March 1934 for a tour of troop duty.

Because he was bright, intelligent, and alert, Hans Jeschonnek was promoted rapidly; in fact, too rapidly. He spent 17 years as a lieutenant. Within the next eight years (1934–42), he was promoted from

lieutenant to colonel general. His advancement had exceeded even his abilities. In the meantime, he served as chief of the operations staff of OKL, where, as a 37-year-old major, he had planned the Luftwaffe's deployment during the reoccupation of the Rhineland. His appointment as chief of the General Staff on February 1, 1939, came as a surprise to many.

Why did Hermann Goering appoint a young colonel to such an important post? We will never know for sure, but a number of factors entered in to the equation. The known antipathy he and Milch felt for each other was certainly a factor. Also, Goering preferred young men to older, more senior officers, who had definite views on matters of high command, were not prone to compromise with people of less military experience and training than themselves (such as the supreme commander of the Luftwaffe), and who felt that they owed little or nothing to Hermann Goering. Goering, in fact, felt threatened by strong-willed officers such as Ritter von Greim, Albert Kesselring, Hugo Sperrle, Baron Wolfram von Richthofen, Helmuth Felmy, Wilhelm Wimmer, and, of course, Erhard Milch. The fact that young Jeschonnek did not pose a threat to Hermann Goering also influenced his appointment.

Hans Jeschonnek's position was difficult from the beginning. He found it hard to force his views on generals who were considerably senior to him in age, rank, and experience. He often felt it necessary to make concessions, especially when dealing with Richthofen and Kesselring. In addition, Jeschonnek did not have Wever's gift for winning the cheerful cooperation of people who differed with him; young Jeschonnek was, by nature, somewhat reserved, and this certainly worked against him. ''Despite his keen intellect,'' Suchenwirth wrote, Jeschonnek ''lacked an understanding of human nature, the cardinal attribute of a leader.''[12]

As if all of this did not make Jeschonnek's task difficult enough, he had difficulties in dealing with Goering's ''inner circle,'' a sort of kitchen cabinet of unofficial advisers that included Bruno Loerzer; Paul ''Pilli'' Koerner, the state secretary for the Four-Year Plan; General Karl Bodenschatz, the chief of the Ministerial Office of the Air Ministry and Goering's liaison officer at Fuehrer Headquarters; Alfred ''Bomber'' Keller, an Old Eagle and training school commander; and Colonel Bernd von Brauchitsch and Lieutenant Colonel Werner Teske, Goering's senior adjutants. None of these men had any use for either Jeschonnek or Milch, whom they looked on as their rivals for power. This group came to be known sarcastically as the ''Little General Staff'' and formed a kind of collateral High Command. Goering took their advice all too often, since he was not prone to going to the trouble of investigating the facts himself. Frequently he would simply issue

orders to the units or to General Staff departments through his adjutants, bypassing Jeschonnek entirely and seriously undercutting his authority. In fact, by this time, the command apparatus of the Luftwaffe was so fragmented that it was virtually leaderless and would remain so throughout its existence.

THE LUFTWAFFE AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Meanwhile, less than two months after the death of General Wever, the Luftwaffe began its first campaign. On July 17, 1936, Francisco Franco and other dissatisfied Spanish generals launched a coup against the Spanish government in Madrid. The results were mixed. The Army of Africa in Spanish Morocco went over to Franco, and soon the rebel forces (called Nationalists) overran the entire colony. Most of northern Spain was overrun by the mutineers; however, the attempt failed in Madrid, Barcelona, and most of the coastal cities, where the rebel forces were massacred. Soon the Nationalists' footholds in southern Spain were reduced to few enclaves around Seville, Granada, and Cadiz.

General Franco was in a critical situation. Most of the Spanish Navy and air force remained loyal to the government, and Franco had no way to ferry his Moroccan troops from Africa to the Spanish mainland; if he could not solve this problem, the rebellion would fail. The pro-Fascist Franco, therefore, had little choice but to appeal to Rome and Berlin for help. He asked Hitler for permission to purchase 10 Ju-52 transports. Instead, with the endorsement of Goering, Milch, and Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the chief of the Abwehr, Hitler promised to send immediate military aid. The next day, 20 Ju-52 transports took off for Seville and Tetuan, Spanish Morocco, followed shortly thereafter by 10 more. It was to be a fateful decision for the Luftwaffe.

During the next month, the German airmen conducted the first military airlift in history. By the end of August, the Luftwaffe had ferried 10,500 combat troops from Morocco to Spain. The following month, the Ju-52s ferried another 9,700 Moroccan troops, along with 44 pieces of artillery, 90 machine guns, and 500 tons of ammunition. They suffered no losses.[13]

Meanwhile, Franco's forces were unable to win a quick and decisive victory over the government, largely because the Soviets sent massive amounts of military aid, especially airplanes, pilots, and a large number of excellent tanks. The French sent pilots and aircraft. Hitler viewed the Soviet involvement as a threat to the peace of Europe, and, in late October, he decided to activate the Condor Legion. Its purpose was to direct all German air and anti-aircraft forces in Spain. Its first commander was Hugo Sperrle, a big, ugly, heavy-jowled bear of a man

who was the son of a brewer. The Condor Legion eventually included a bomber group, a fighter group, an air reconnaissance squadron, a naval air squadron, a signal battalion, a nine-battery anti-aircraft battalion, an air armaments group (including an aircraft park), a medical battalion, and a meteorological service battalion. Sperrle and his successors were responsible only to General Franco and thus held rank equivalent to air theater commander, although the Legion probably never controlled more than 5,500 men.[14] The importance of the Condor Legion, however, did not rest with its size, but rather with the fact that, by necessity and design, it did considerable experimenting with aircraft, formation flying and organization, and tactics under actual combat conditions. Most of the tactics and operational doctrines the Luftwaffe employed in World War II were developed in Spain.

The Spanish Civil War raged on for almost three years, before the Loyalist government surrendered in Madrid on March 29, 1939, and Franco entered the city.[15] His victory was largely due to the support given to him by the Germans and especially by the Condor Legion. During the conflict, it registered 386 aerial victories, while losing only 72 aircraft to enemy fighters or anti-aircraft fire. It sank 52 enemy ships and dropped 21,046 tons of bombs on enemy targets. It lost 420 men killed, about half of whom died in traffic accidents on the poor mountain roads of Spain. During this time, the Luftwaffe had a chance to develop the aircraft it would use in World War II and to decide which should be retained and which should be replaced. Very early on, for example, Sperrle determined that the He-51 fighter was inferior to Communist aircraft and should be replaced by the Me-109, which shot down 22 enemy airplanes without a loss in a five-day period shortly after its arrival in Iberia. He also determined that the Ju-52 was unsuitable as a bomber, so it was replaced by the twin-engine He-111 and the single-engine Ju-87 Stuka dive-bomber. The He-46 and He-70 ''Blitz'' were scrapped as reconnaissance aircraft and replaced by the Do-17, which proved to be a disappointment in its role as a long-range bomber.

On the battlefield, the Luftwaffe abandoned the outmoded tactics of the slow biplanes of World War I and introduced innovations that would play a fateful role in World War II. One of the major innovators was a young lieutenant named Werner Moelders, who changed fighter tactics forever. He invented the ''Finger Four'' formation, based on the *Schwarm* of four airplanes, which was divided into *Rotten* of two aircraft each. Each Rotte could operate independently in the defense or attack, but could also cooperate with the other Rotte, depending on the tactical situation. When a Rotte was operating independently, the Rotte leader flew in the forward position, with the other airplane flying about 600 feet behind him, protecting his rear. At this distance, both

pilots could concentrate on looking for the enemy, rather than on maintaining a tight formation, as the enemy did, and as the British did early in World War II. Since the pilot who spotted the enemy first won an aerial dogfight approximately 85 percent of the time, this formation gave the Germans a marked advantage in Spain and later in France in 1940.

When either Rotten or a Schwarm flew together, they usually assumed the Finger Four formation, which took its name because it resembled the extended fingers of a hand. Again the space between airplanes was several hundred feet, so that maximum attention could be devoted to finding the enemy, with very little time expended in maintaining formation. This led to maximum visibility, maneuverability, and cooperation, and usually resulted in a concentration of firepower in favor of the Germans. This formation is still used by American jet aircraft today, although the distance between aircraft is much greater. Not even the Royal Air Force, with excellent pilots and superior aircraft, were able to defeat their German counterparts until they abandoned the outmoded concept of the tight formation flying and adopted comparable tactics.

Another less laudatory Luftwaffe air tactic was also introduced in Spain: the Fascist terror raid. On April 26, 1937, Sperrle and his chief of staff, Baron Wolfram von Richthofen, attacked the Basque town of Guernica with He-111 and Ju-52 bombers. They dropped incendiary and high-explosive bombs, while He-51 fighters strafed fleeing and unarmed civilians, in clear violation of international law. Some 1,654 civilians were killed in this attack and another 889 were wounded.[16] Guernica, Fletcher wrote later ''has since become a synonym for Fascist brutality in Spain.''[17]

A great many of the men who served in Spain later went on to distinguish themselves in World War II. The Condor Legion had three commanders: Sperrle, Major General Helmuth Volkmann, and Baron von Richthofen. Sperrle and Richthofen both became field marshals—and the Luftwaffe had but six in its history. (Volkmann was unhappy in the Luftwaffe [and with Goering] and transferred back to the army in 1939 as a general of infantry. Despite his grade, he took charge of the Saxon 94th Infantry Division and led it in France. He was killed in an automobile accident on August 21, 1940, at the age of 51.)

Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Holle, the first chief of staff of the Condor Legion, rose to the rank of lieutenant general and was commanding the 4th Air Fleet on the Eastern Front in 1944. Major Hermann Plocher, Volkmann's chief of staff, ended the war as a lieutenant general in command of the 6th Parachute Division. Lieutenant Colonel Hans Seidemann, the last chief of staff of the Legion, later served as commander of the VIII Air Corps, which he led on the Eastern Front

from late 1943 until the end of the war. He was a general of fliers in 1945.

A remarkable number of the pilots of the Condor Legion distinguished themselves over the battlefields of World War II. Of the three generals of the fighter arm that Germany had during the war, two came from the Condor Legion (Moelders and Adolf Galland). Six Legion pilots shot down more than 100 enemy airplanes during World War II: Herbert Ihlefeld (123 kills), Walter Oesau (115 kills), Moelders (115, excluding 14 kills in Spain), Guenther Luetzow (105 kills), Galland (103 kills), and Reinhard Seiler (100 kills). Baron Hans-Henning von Beust, who commanded a squadron in the Legion's bomber group, became the general of bomber forces in the last month of the war. Lieutenant Colonel Baron Siegmund-Ulrich von Gravenreuth was a leading anti-shipping pilot and sank a number of Allied transports and warships before he died in an accident in 1944. Major Martin Harlinghausen, the naval air squadron commander in the Legion, personally accounted for 26 enemy ships before assuming command of the II Air Corps in 1943. Other veterans of the Legion had successes almost as noteworthy. Despite the valuable combat experience the Luftwaffe gained in the war, the impressive list of victories it won, and the incredible number of successes its alumni registered later, as well as all of the advantages it accrued from its experience in Iberia, the overall results of the German experience in Spain must be recorded as distinctly negative. In Spain, the Condor Legion firmly adopted the fallacious idea that fast, well-armed bombers could protect themselves against enemy fighters in daylight bombing operations. It also adopted the fateful strategy of emphasizing tactical considerations (for example, close air support for ground forces, especially dive-bombing) at the expense of a well-balanced program of tactical and strategic aerial warfare. As a result, the German Luftwaffe stressed the development of dive-bombers and medium bombers that could dive, while it neglected the development of long-range bombers, long-range fighters, and single-engine fighters. The system of close air support and dive-bombing that was instituted in Spain led to the Luftwaffe's greatest victories in the years 1939–42. It also contributed to its neglect of strategic aerial warfare, which in turn led to its greatest (and final) defeats. The leader in this movement for close air support was Baron Wolfram von Richthofen, a man who had influence far beyond his rank. Richthofen was the cousin of Manfred von Richthofen, the famous ''Red Baron,'' who shot down 80 enemy airplanes in World War I, making him the most successful ace of the war. Another cousin (Lothar) shot down 40. Wolfram himself (who was born in Barzdorf, Silesia, in 1895) was a graduate of Gross-Lichterfelde. He entered the Imperial Army as an officer cadet in the 4th Hussars in 1913, was commissioned in June

1914, and spent the first three years of World War I as a cavalry officer on the Eastern Front. He joined the Red Baron's 1st Fighter Wing on March 27, 1918—less than one month before his famous cousin met his death. Here, also, Richthofen met Hermann Goering for the first time.

The younger Baron von Richthofen shot down eight enemy airplanes during his short tour of duty as a fighter pilot. He left the army with the honorary (*charakteristik*) rank of first lieutenant and enrolled in the Hanover Technical School as an engineering student, where he received his degree in 1924. He continued to do postgraduate work and received his advanced degree, the *Diplom Ingenieur*, in 1929. Meanwhile, in 1923, he entered the Reichswehr as a second lieutenant in the Prussian 11th Cavalry Regiment. Before long, he was deeply involved in the clandestine air units and in the secret General Staff.

Wolfram von Richthofen transferred to the clandestine Luftwaffe almost as soon as Hitler came to power. In Spain, as chief of staff to Sperrle and later as commander of the Condor Legion, Richthofen had his first opportunity to distinguish himself, and he took full advantage of it. Not only did he prove to be an extremely efficient General Staff officer, but he was a skillful diplomat and negotiator. He was already fluent in Italian and he quickly mastered Spanish as well. This naturally impressed the rebel commanders, and Franco especially respected of the young lieutenant colonel.

Richthofen and Sperrle, among others, were overly impressed by the need for close air support, at the expense of a well-balanced program of tactical and strategic development. This in itself was not serious; what was serious was the fact that they swept Jeschonnek, Udet, and the High Command of the Luftwaffe along with them. Their influence dominated the German Air Force in the years immediately before the war and in the first years of the conflict, and this influence turned out to be disastrous. In 1957, retired General of Fliers Karl Drum wrote:

> Luftwaffe command circles, both before and during the Second World War, were greatly influenced by the strong personality of Baron von Richthofen. The units under his command during World War II . . . were always the ones sent into action at the critical point in the ground operations. In his own method of operation, in the organization of his staffs and their subordinate agencies, and in the command of his units, von Richthofen was a firm adherent of ''close-support tactics at all costs.'' Without exception he employed all his units in close-support operations on behalf of the Army, regardless of their degree of combat readiness or their suitability and usefulness for this type of operation. This also applied to anti-aircraft artillery. Again and again he employed them in large-scale operations requiring the participation of all available forces. The resultant attrition of forces, the losses, and the consequent need for replacements were all at the expense of other sectors of the front and other areas of operation; in the last analysis, of course, they made deep inroads into the

substance of the Luftwaffe as a whole. It cannot be denied that von Richthofen's methods brought some spectacular results. Though often limited in terms of time and area, these results were undeniably tangible and thus very welcome to the Army, which, after all, benefited most by them. The inevitable consequences of this state of affairs was that close-support tactics were strongly propagated within the Luftwaffe and, during lengthy periods throughout the war, were applied as a general practice, often against the better judgment of the commanders in charge and the leaders of individual units.

After the Battle of Britain, the first negative aspects of this development began to become apparent on the Eastern Front, during the autumn of 1942. Although they suffered tremendous losses at the front, the Russians were able to make them up and even to reinforce their strength because their industries, their oil refineries, their transport and communications network, and their supply system in the hinterland had hardly been subjected to air attack, not even at a time when the German bombers would have been fully capable, in terms of range and strength, of delivering destructive blows against these targets.

In 1943, when it was apparent to all concerned that a fundamental error had been committed, it was too late to change the method of employment of the Luftwaffe. While close-support tactics had been employed by choice up to this point, after 1943 they continued to be employed by necessity, since the overall military situation permitted nothing else. This was true not only of the Eastern Front but also of all the other theaters of operations and the home front. From this time on, von Richthofen's influence began to diminish, and the method of employment he developed in Spain was recognized to be out of date.[18]

Drum goes on to state that it would be unfair to judge Richthofen alone as responsible for the catastrophe that overtook the Luftwaffe in the last years of the war. ''After all,'' he correctly adds, ''it was the responsibility of the Luftwaffe's top-level command to keep the tactical employment of the air units within a reasonable limit without losing sight of the need for strategic air operations as well.''[19] This the High Command of the Luftwaffe did not do, largely because of the influence Richthofen exerted over Udet and especially over young Colonel Hans Jeschonnek, who was totally unable to stand up to Richthofen's dominant personality. As a result, Richthofen guided the Luftwaffe down the path of close air support, and the German Air Force became ''flying artillery'' for the army and very little else. Thus, in a very real sense, the Battle of Britain was effectively lost in Spain, as we shall see.

NOTES

1. Maier, ''Air Doctrine,'' p. 213.
2. Hans H. Hildebrand and Ernst Henriot, *Deutschland Admirale, 1849–1945* (1990), vol. 3, pp. 590–91 (hereafter cited as Hildebrand and Henriot).
3. Maier, ''Air Doctrine,'' p. 213.

4. Wilhelm Speidel, ''The Luftwaffe in the Polish Campaign,'' United States Air Force Historical Studies, no. 151, Aerospace Studies Institute (1956) (hereafter cited as Speidel, ''Poland'').

5. Richard Suchenwirth, ''The Development of the German Air Force,'' United States Air Force Historical Studies, no. 160, Harry R. Fletcher, ed., Aerospace Studies Institute (1968) (hereafter cited as Suchenwirth, ''Development of the GAP'').

6. Cooper, *GAF*, p. 19.

7. The Me-109 was originally built by the *Bayerische Flugzeugwerke* (the Bavarian Aircraft Works), which is why it was originally designated Bf-109. Messerschmitt acquired the property in 1938, renamed it Messerschmitt AG, and redesignated the airplane Me-109. It will be referred to as Me-109 throughout this book, to avoid confusion.

8. See Tony Wood and Bill Gunston, *Hitler's Luftwaffe* (n.d.; reprint ed., 1984), pp. 219–24, for a detailed technical history of this aircraft (hereafter cited as Wood and Gunston).

9. Richard Suchenwirth, ''Historical Turning Points in the German Air Force War Effort,'' United States Air Force Historical Studies, no. 189, Aerospace Studies Institute (1969) (hereafter cited as Suchenwirth, ''Turning Points'').

10. Cajus Bekker, *The Luftwaffe War Diaries* (1969), p. 328 (hereafter cited as Bekker, *Luftwaffe*).

11. Milch's explanation for their difficulties is given in Irving, *Milch*. This explanation, given years after Jeschonnek's death, does not have the ring of truth to it, as far as this author is concerned.

12. Richard Suchenwirth, ''Command and Leadership in the German Air Force,'' United States Air Force Historical Studies, no. 174, Aerospace Studies Institute (1969) (hereafter cited as Suchenwirth, ''Command'').

13. Herbert M. Mason, Jr., *The Rise of the Luftwaffe* (1973), p. 218.

14. Unfortunately, almost all of the Condor Legion's records were lost or destroyed at the end of World War II. The Legion's war diary was lost, as were the war diaries of all of its subordinate units, except that of the signals battalion (Harry R. Fletcher, Personal Communication, 1984).

15. For detailed accounts of the German involvement in the Spanish Civil War, see Raymond L. Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War* (1983); Karl Drum, ''The German Air Force in the Spanish Civil War,'' United States Air Force Historical Studies, no. 150, Aerospace Studies Institute (1965) (hereafter cited as Drum, ''Spanish Civil War''); and Harry R. Fletcher, ''Legion Condor: Hitler's Military Aid to Franco'' (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1961) (hereafter cited as Fletcher).

16. Bruce R. Pirnie, ''First Test for the War Machine,'' *World War II*, vol. 1, no. 5 (January 1987), p. 48.

17. Fletcher, pp. 147–48.

18. Drum, ''Spanish Civil War.''

19. Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII
EXPANSION AND PURGES

THE MILITARY EXPANSION CONTINUES

In 1937, three new corps headquarters were created in Germany. These were not Wehrkreise, but corps in the true sense of the word: they had no territorial responsibilities and, upon mobilization, would be called motorized corps. The XIV Corps at Magdeburg controlled Germany's motorized divisions; the XV Corps, headquartered at Jena, controlled the new German light divisions, and the XVI Corps at Berlin directed the three panzer divisions. Initially, these three corps were commanded by Generals Gustav von Wietersheim, Hermann Hoth, and Oswald Lutz, respectively.

The German motorized division at that time had an authorized strength of about 16,400 men, or 1,400 fewer than the standard infantry division. It had three motorized infantry regiments and was organized exactly like a standard infantry division (which it once had been), except it had no horse-drawn units and no veterinary components. During the war, these units became much smaller and lost their third regiments, but usually a panzer battalion was added. In 1937, the army created four motorized divisions: the 2nd, 13th, 20th, and 29th.

The three light divisions were in a sense experimental, just like the panzer divisions. There were considerable differences in their internal organizations, however. The 1st Light had a motorized infantry brigade, which consisted of one motorized infantry regiment and a motorcycle battalion. It also had a panzer regiment and a reconnaissance battalion. The 2nd Light Division had two motorized infantry regiments, a light panzer battalion, and a reconnaissance regiment. The 3rd Light had a motorized infantry regiment, a motorcycle battalion, a light panzer battalion, and a reconnaissance regiment. The 4th Light Division, which was created in 1938, was organized just like the 2nd. All had engineer, signal, and other support units similar to those of the

panzer divisions and all were motorized. All four light divisions had the same divisional artillery as the panzer division—one regiment with two battalions of towed howitzers. The strength of the light divisions was about 11,000 officers and men each.

To control the three new corps, Fritsch created Headquarters, Army Group 4 at Leipzig, under the command of General of Artillery Walter von Brauchitsch. Also non-territorial, it directed all of Germany's highly mobile formations: three panzer, three light, and four motorized divisions.

No new active duty infantry divisions where created in 1937, although the ranks of the existing divisions were filled by volunteers and draftees until they all approached their authorized strength of 17,875 officers and men. Twenty nine Landwehr and *Landsturm* (reserve infantry) divisions were organized. Few of these reached their authorized strengths of about 16,000 men until after 1937. Meanwhile, the 1st Mountain Division was activated at Garmisch Partenkirchen. Initially it was huge—more than 24,000 men, organized into three mountain infantry regiments and an artillery regiment of four battalions. The light mountain artillery battalions were equipped with 75-millimeter pack guns, which could be dismantled and carried by mules. Its medium battalions were equipped with 150-millimeter howitzers, which were the same type of howitzers used by infantry divisions. The 1st Mountain proved to be too bulky and hard to control, and future mountain divisions were reduced to two mountain infantry regiments and a mountain artillery regiment of three battalion (17,000 men total). The 1st Mountain Division lost its third mountain infantry regiment (the 100th) in November 1940, but retained its fourth artillery battalion until it was smashed on the Eastern Front in 1945.

All in all, then, the army had reason to be pleased with its efforts in 1937. Its military expansion, of course, continued in 1938, when even greater challenges needed to be met.

THE PURGE OF THE DEFENSE MINISTER

One of the most fateful meetings in the history of Nazi Germany took place at the Reichschancellery on Wilhelmstrasse from 4:15 P.M. to 8:30 P.M. on November 5, 1937. Present (and doing most of the talking) was Adolf Hitler. Also present were Field Marshal von Blomberg, minister of war; General Baron von Fritsch; Admiral Raeder; Colonel General Hermann Goering; Baron Konstantin von Neurath, foreign minister; and Colonel Friedrich Hossbach, Wehrmacht adjutant to the Fuehrer. History has since named this meeting the ''Hossbach Conference,'' after the man who took the notes.[1]

Hitler began by saying that he wished to inform the gentlemen present of his basic ideas concerning the opportunities Germany had to develop her position in the field of foreign affairs and to discuss long-term German policy. In the event of his death, this exposition was to be regarded as his last will and testament.

The aim of German foreign policy, he continued, was to secure and preserve the German racial community (*Volksmasse*) and to enlarge it. Germany must have living space, he said. He proceeded to justify his demands for Lebensraum in considerable detail, discussing autarchy, history, world economics, birth rates, and related subjects. Then he came to the point: two ''hate-inspired'' countries stood in Germany's way (Britain and France). They and the Soviet Union must be considered as the major political power factors in German calculations. German planning should therefore be based on three cases.

Case I called for war by 1943–45 at the latest. After that time, Germany's international situation could only grow worse, relative to the rest of the world. If he were still alive, Hitler said, he was determined to solve the problem of German living space (that is, to go to war) by 1943–45.

The war was to begin even earlier if Case II or III came to pass. Case II involved a domestic political crisis in France that absorbed the resources of the French Army and rendered it incapable of waging war against Germany. In that case, the time for action against Czechoslovakia had come.

Case III would occur if France became embroiled in a war with another state. In that case, or in the case of an Anglo-French war against Italy, Germany would then overthrow Austria and Czechoslovakia simultaneously. This war, Hitler thought, was definitely coming closer and was the true reason behind his Spanish policy. Should this war occur, Germany must be ready to take advantage of it as early as 1938. This date shocked the generals: 1938 was only eight weeks away.

The response of his listeners was not the burst of enthusiastic support that Hitler apparently expected. Blomberg and Fritsch made it clear that they did not consider the German Army ready for a major war involving a number of powers and warned against underestimating the defensive abilities of the French and the Czechoslovakian armies. Neurath indicated that he considered Hitler's confidence that both France and Britain would write off central Europe in the event of cases II or III to be wholly misplaced. Even Goering suggested that they settle their military commitment in Spain before becoming involved in another war. Admiral Raeder said next to nothing during the entire discussion, although later he had a private audience with the Fuehrer. During this meeting, Adolf Hitler assured Raeder that war would not come until 1943–45 and that there was no question of a

naval war against Britain. Raeder believed him and continued to prepare as before; he never mentioned the meeting again.

The most dramatic reaction to the Hossbach Conference came from Baron von Neurath. He was so badly shaken that he had a heart attack on November 7 and suffered several more before Christmas. Only hours before his first attack, he met with Generals Fritsch and Beck, and the three of them agreed that Germany should not embark on a war unless she had at least a 51 percent chance of winning it. Accordingly, Fritsch was selected as their spokesman, and he met with Hitler on November 9. The details of this important meeting, unfortunately, have not come down to us, although the results are known all too well. Hitler was so annoyed with his subordinates after meeting with Fritsch that he would not even see Baron von Neurath until January 1938, and only then to relieve him of his post. In fact, before three months had elapsed, four of the seven men who attended the Hossbach Conference had been removed from their jobs. The first to go was Nazi Germany's first field marshal, Minister of War Werner von Blomberg.

Werner von Blomberg had stood high in both Hitler's estimation and that of the army in 1935. In fact, on April 20, 1936, the dictator had used the occasion of his own 47th birthday to promote Blomberg to the rank of field marshal and had made him commander-in-chief of the armed forces before that. Blomberg's stock with the Fuehrer, however, had fallen markedly since the Rhineland crisis, when Blomberg exhibited such nervous behavior that Hitler considered it cowardly. Blomberg aggravated the Fuehrer by opposing his Spanish commitments. Meanwhile, because he constantly supported Hitler on almost every issue and allowed the Nazi Party and its subordinate organizations to make tremendous inroads into the former corporate independence of the armed forces (see above), Blomberg lost his standing with and much of the confidence of the army. Whereas the senior officers had previously called the tall and physically impressive war minister ''Siegfried with a monocle,'' they now called him the ''Rubber Lion'' (*Gummi-Loewe*) and ''Hitler's Boy Quex'' (*Hitler-Junge Quex*), after a romanticized cinema character who was a member of the Hitler Youth. He lost further ground with his army commander-in-chief, Baron von Fritsch, after the Hossbach Conference. Blomberg became nervous and upset after the meeting and quickly retreated from his opposition to the Fuehrer's wishes. In mid-December, he approved a draft for Case Green (war against Prague), which stated that Czechoslovakia could be successfully attacked, even *before* the Wehrmacht was completely prepared for war—provided, that is, she were deprived of all of her allies except the Soviet Union. Fritsch, whose own opposition remained unbending, was quite put out by the field marshal's vacillation.

Blomberg had been a lonely man since his wife of 28 years died in 1932. By now, he was secretly seeing Eva Gruhn, a stenographer with the Reich Egg Marketing Board, whom he probably met on one of his clandestine jaunts to the Berlin nightclub district. She was described as petite, pretty, with fair hair, gray-blue eyes, and a more than ample mouth. (I have seen photographs of her on www.forum.axishistory.com. While she was not ugly, I would not have described her as pretty. And I definitely would not describe her as petite.) He knew that she had a past, but did not know it included prostitution and a conviction for posing for pornography.

They were married in some haste (Eva was pregnant but later miscarried) in a small, private wedding ceremony that took place on January 12, 1938, in the War Ministry, with Hitler and Goering serving as witnesses. Not one of Blomberg's five grown children attended, his staff was not invited, and not even Reichenau learned of the marriage until after the fact.

Meanwhile, a Berlin detective realized that the woman in one of his files was Eva von Blomberg. He passed the file on to Count von Helldorf, the police president of Berlin and a former officer. Instead of handing it over to his Nazi superiors (as he should have done, according to regulations), he took it to General of Artillery Wilhelm Keitel, the head of Blomberg's armed forces office in the war ministry. Instead of confronting Blomberg, Keitel told Helldorf to take it to Hermann Goering. Hitler's deputy got his hands on the vice file on Saturday, January 22, 1938, and was delighted, because he wanted to be defense minister. ''Blomberg has married a whore!'' he announced to Adolf Hitler on January 24, as he presented the explosive documents to the Fuehrer at Berchtesgaden. Unlike his deputy, Hitler was not at all pleased by this development. If a German field marshal could do this, he muttered, then anything in the world was possible. Goering, not forgetting to lament his role as the bearer of bad news, informed Hitler that Blomberg would have to be dismissed. Hitler was not sure that that was necessary, but Goering assured him that it was. The Prussian Officer Corps would not tolerate him after this outrage, he declared.

The Gross-Lichterfeld graduate knew what he was talking about. The Officers' Corps was already upset; Blomberg's pro-Nazi policies had alienated many of the senior officers; and several generals, including von Fritsch and Beck, were already demanding his resignation.

Hermann Goering personally informed Blomberg of the bad news about his wife that same day. The marshal was shocked, as one might guess, and offered to divorce her at once. It was too late for that now, Goering replied, politely but firmly. The Army High Command was already calling for his resignation, and Blomberg would have no choice but to comply.

The following day, Hitler called Blomberg in and dismissed him. Alfred Jodl recorded that the Fuehrer treated the disgraced field marshal man with ''superhuman kindness,'' and indeed he did.[2] He told Blomberg that he should go into exile for a year and gave him 50,000 Reichsmarks to make the trip. Some of the senior officers were calling for a special court of honor to consider the Blomberg case, but Hitler promised the retiring marshal that he would see to it that there would be no such court, and indeed no such body ever convened. Finally, he gave Blomberg the opportunity to recommend his own successor. Ironically, Blomberg suggested Goering, but Hitler rejected this notion out of hand; Goering was too lazy, he said.

Werner von Blomberg was deeply wounded by what he considered the treacherous behavior of the Officers' Corps—even Reichenau had turned against him. He therefore refrained from recommending Baron von Fritsch, Gerd von Rundstedt, or some other senior general, for by now he knew that Beck, von Leeb, and Brauchitsch were all in league against him. Instead, on January 27, the day he took his final leave of Hitler, Blomberg landed one more damaging, parting blow against the General Staff by suggesting to the Fuehrer that he, Adolf Hitler, assume the post of war minister. Apparently, this solution had not occurred to Hitler until this moment, but the idea certainly appealed to him. He did not reply to the suggestion directly, but rather asked Blomberg who was in charge of the Armed Forces staff under him. Wilhelm Keitel, the surprised Blomberg responded, but there was no question of using him, because ''he's nothing but the man who runs my office.''

That was exactly the kind of nonentity Hitler was looking for. He set up an appointment to interview Keitel that very afternoon.[3]

Wilhelm Keitel was indeed just the man Hitler was looking for. Born on his family's estate of Helmscherode in western Brunswick on September 22, 1882, he wanted to be a farmer. Unfortunately, the Keitel's modest 650 estate was too small to support two families, so Wilhelm joined the 46th Field Artillery Regiment as a Fahnenjunker in 1901. All of his life, however, Keitel longed to be a farmer.

He was commissioned second lieutenant in 1902 and, in 1909, married Lisa Fontaine, an attractive, intelligent young woman who wanted her husband to advance as high as he possibly could in the ranks in the army. By far the stronger of the two, she supplied much of the motivation behind her weak-willed husband, who was promoted far above his competency in the 1930s. Meanwhile, Keitel underwent General Staff training until World War I broke out; he then served on the Western Front until September 1914, when he was severely wounded by a shell splinter in the right forearm. After he recovered, he returned to the 46th Artillery, where he was a battery commander until he

received his appointment to the General Staff in March 1915. He served in various General Staff appointments and ended the war on the General Staff of the Naval Corps, fighting in Flanders.

Keitel emerged from the war as a captain and spent the 1920s in more or less routine assignments. After serving as the commander of an artillery battalion, Keitel returned to the General Staff in 1929 as chief of the Organizations Department, where he played a major role in the (illegal) expansion of the German Army. Whatever else can be said of him, Wilhelm Keitel was an excellent administrator. Even his personal enemy, Erich von Manstein, praised his work in this post; however, it took its toll both physically and mentally on the nervous Keitel. By 1932, he was suffering from thrombosis, arterial embolism, and severe phlebitis in his right leg. After undergoing a cure in the Tara Mountains of Czechoslovakia, he was named Infantry Commander III at Potsdam. On April 1, 1934, he was promoted to major general. The following month, however, his father died, and Keitel inherited Helmscherode. He took a furlough and seriously considered leaving the service, but found that his wife, stepmother, and sister could not live together under the same roof.

In July 1934, Keitel was transferred to the 18th Infantry Division in Liegnitz, more than 300 miles from Helmscherode. He again seriously considered leaving the army, but General Baron von Fritsch, the commander-in-chief of the army, dissuaded him from doing so by offering him a new assignment: commander of the newly authorized 22nd Infantry Division, then forming at Bremen, near Wilhelm's family farm. Keitel accepted, and, in doing so, unwittingly took the road that led to the gallows at Nuremberg.

Keitel thoroughly enjoyed his new command, for organizing and developing units was right up his alley. Then, in August 1935, upon the recommendation of General von Fritsch, Werner von Blomberg offered him the post of chief of the *Wehrmachtamt* (Armed Forces Office) in the War Ministry. The other candidate for the post, Major General Heinrich von Vietinghoff, soon announced that he did not want the job. Although his wife urged him to accept the appointment, Keitel hesitated, because ''I wanted nothing to do with politics.''[4] In the end, however, the weak-willed Keitel yielded to the urgings of his wife and took charge of the Armed Forces Office on September 9, 1935. He was promoted to lieutenant general in 1936 and to general of artillery on August 1, 1937.

In his new post, Keitel never disagreed with his boss and was just as much a yes-man to Blomberg as he would become to Hitler. In Keitel, Hitler found just the man he was looking for. Keitel was a believer in the Fuehrer Principle—he would be absolutely obedient to the dictator and would carry out his orders without question. He was, in short,

a complete yes-man, content to serve as a glorified executive officer without independent command prerogatives. Hitler appointed Keitel commander-in-chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces (*Oberkommando des Wehrmacht* or OKW), on February 4, 1938.

THE PURGE OF THE ARMY HIGH COMMAND

Baron Werner Thomas Ludwig von Fritsch, colonel general and commander-in-chief of the German Army, was the next to go. On January 26, 1938, Colonel Hossbach was pleased to learn that Hitler was not going to replace Blomberg with Goering but was disturbed to find out that Hitler was planning to dismiss Fritsch under paragraph 175 (for homosexual offenses). Hitler specifically instructed Hossbach not to tell Fritsch of his plans, but that very evening the colonel went to Fritsch's apartment in the Bendlerstrasse building and informed him of Hitler's suspicions. Fritsch was so ill-informed that he was actually awaiting word that he had been chosen Blomberg's successor. He immediately suspected that Himmler and Goering were conspiring against him.

The following day, Hossbach told Hitler that he had disobeyed his orders and had spoken with Fritsch. The Nazi dictator remained uncharacteristically calm in the face of this piece of blatant disobedience. He rejected Hossbach's request that a court of inquiry be convened to examine the case but agreed that Fritsch should be allowed to be confronted by his accuser. A meeting was set up for that very evening.

The allegations against Fritsch were completely untrue. As Fritsch suspected, they had been concocted by Himmler, Goering, and Reinhart Heydrich, the sinister number two man in the SS. They charged Fritsch with having paid blackmail to an ex-convict named Hans Schmidt since 1935, after Schmidt had caught Fritsch performing a homosexual act in a dark alley near a Potsdam railroad station with an unsavory thug named Bavarian Joe. Actually, Schmidt had been blackmailing a now-bedridden retired cavalry captain named Frisch, and Himmler and others knew it. However, the Gestapo apprehended Schmidt and gave him two choices: bare witness against General von Fritsch and stick with his story, come what may, or die. Not surprisingly, Schmidt chose the first alternative.

Baron von Fritsch met with Hitler in the Chancellery library that evening. Goering and Himmler were also present. Fritsch gave Hitler his word of honor that the allegations were completely untrue. Then Himmler produced Schmidt, who nervously repeated his story exactly as the Gestapo had told him to tell it. Fritsch, an officer and an aristocratic gentleman, was literally too outraged to answer. Nothing in his

background or training had prepared him for this! Hitler, however, took his failure to speak as an admission of guilt and asked for his resignation. Fritsch demanded a trial by a military court of honor, but Hitler sent him on an indefinite leave of absence and, in effect, suspended him as commander-in-chief of the army. The next day he conferred with Keitel about replacements for both Blomberg *and* Fritsch.

By January 28, Hitler had decided to take over Blomberg's duties himself and restructure the armed forces. His chief executive officer would be Wilhelm Keitel, who would occupy the new post of commander-in-chief of OKW. Beneath this new command would be the Luftwaffe (OKL), the navy (OKM), and the army (OKH), which would be headed by the new commander-in-chief of the army. Of critical importance to the Nazi dictator at this point was to find an army officer of some status who would simultaneously be acceptable to the senior generals and who would accept the new command structure. Hitler's first choice was General von Reichenau, but when the Fuehrer met with the senior general in the army on January 31, Gerd von Rundstedt made it quite clear that Reichenau was unacceptable to too many generals. Rundstedt himself threatened to retire, rather than serve under this ruthlessly ambitious pro-Nazi. Other choices were rejected by Hitler. Rundstedt, he felt, was too old (or so he said), Joachim von Stuelpnagel was ''disloyal'' (that is, anti-Nazi), Ludwig Beck was too much like Werner von Fritsch, and Ritter von Leeb was too religious. Finally, Keitel recommended Walter von Brauchitsch. Hitler was unenthusiastic, but, since he could think of no one better, agreed to meet with Brauchitsch to discuss the appointment.

Walter von Brauchitsch was born in Berlin in 1881, the son of a Prussian general of cavalry and the brother of Major General Adolf von Brauchitsch, who died in 1935. From his earliest days, it was clear that Walter was a Prussian general-in-training and his career progressed normally for a general-elect. It was known that Baron von Fritsch considered Brauchitsch his ''best horse'' and considered him to be a possible successor.[5] By 1937, he was a general of artillery and, as commander of Army Group 4, was in charge of all of Germany's mobile forces. It seemed to outside observers that he was earmarked for greater things. Far from believing that he was on the verge of a great career, however, Brauchitsch thought that he was at the end of the line. He faced the prospect of retirement in disgrace, forced to eek out a living on inadequate financial meets, ostracized by his friends and the officer caste, and separated from everything he held dear. The reason for this bleak prognostication was a woman—or, more accurately, two women.

According to General Curt Siewert, Brauchitsch's wife was an unattractive ''governess type,'' lacking in femininity and human warmth.[6]

She and the general had been living apart for five years, although Brauchitsch had had at least one extramarital affair before they separated. The other woman was a beautiful, sexy divorcee named Charlotte Rueffer, the daughter of a Silesian judge. They had met in Berlin in 1925 or 1926, and Brauchitsch had asked his wife for a divorce at that time, but she refused. His relationship with Charlotte then cooled, and she married a bank director named Schmidt, but he drowned in a bathtub during a business trip; she was thus able to resume her liaison with Brauchitsch when he returned to Berlin in 1937.

Brauchitsch was determined to free himself from his wife and marry Charlotte by early 1938, but his wife was unwilling to grant him a divorce without a large lump-sum cash payment. Brauchitsch could not meet her demands and knew that she would contest the divorce if he did not. A divorce was bad enough in the late 1930s, but a scandal was something that the Prussian Officers' Corps would not tolerate, even from its generals. Brauchitsch knew that if he proceeded, his 38-year military career would be destroyed; he was nevertheless determined to forge ahead, even though it meant professional ruin. Then, suddenly, he received an offer that would leave him happily divorced, his ex-wife financially secure, and himself promoted to colonel general and commander-in-chief of the German Army. Personal considerations aside, this represented quite a jump for von Brauchitsch, who was 10th on the seniority list at the time. Unfortunately, there were strings attached. Brauchitsch would have to meet a series of demands put forth by Adolf Hitler. These included accepting the new command structure, renouncing the Army's traditional position as ''first among equals'' vis-a-vis the navy and Luftwaffe, and retiring or transferring a great many of his friends and fellow generals.

Werner von Brauchitsch had to struggle with his conscience. His previous attitude toward the Nazis had been one of cold aloofness, punctuated by periods of outright hostility; in fact, he had excelled the SS from the Wehrkreis I war games and dealt firmly with Erich Koch, the fanatical Nazi Gauleiter of East Prussia. When Goebbels had spread an unflattering rumor about his personal life, he found himself challenged to a duel by the irate commander. Brauchitsch professed to be a deeply religious man and was known to keep a Bible beside his bed. Certainly he had little use for the Nazis—until Hermann Goering, acting as intermediary for Adolf Hitler, offered him a way out of his marriage without destroying his military career.

The details of the negotiations of January 31 to February 3, 1938, were never fully revealed and now must be regarded as lost. The results, however, are known. Brauchitsch ''sold out'' to the Nazis. ''To achieve his new position,'' Telford Taylor wrote later, ''Brauchitsch stooped to the meanest concessions and put himself under permanent

obligation to Goering and Keitel as well as to Hitler. For this dismal surrender of principle for position, the officers' paid soon and dear.''[7] Taylor was certainly right when he wrote that. Brauchitsch was named commander-in-chief of the German Army on February 4, 1938, and the army lost its previously unquestioned hegemony in German military affairs. Frau von Brauchitsch received a cash payment, variously reported as 80,000 to a quarter of a million Reichsmarks, and was quietly divorced from her husband, who married Charlotte Schmidt, a fanatical Nazi who constantly reminded her husband of ''how much we owe the Fuehrer.'' And every general Hitler did not like was either transferred or forced into retirement.

The first to go was Lieutenant General Victor von Schwelder, the non-Nazi chief of the Army Personnel Office, and his two principal deputies, Colonels Adolf Kuntzen and Hans Behlendorff, who had constantly rejected Nazi attempts to obtain the best appointments for NSDAP sympathizers. All three were given commands outside of Berlin. Schwelder was replaced by Colonel Bodewin Keitel, the brother of the new chief of OKW. This would ensure important and favorable appointments for officers who were more sympathetic to the Nazi cause and helped curtail the corporate independence of the army.

Those forced into retirement included Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb, the commander of Army Group 2 (discharged with the *charakterisierte* rank of colonel general); General of Cavalry Ewald von Kleist, the promonarchist commander of Wehrkreis VIII; General of Cavalry Franz Kress von Kressenstein, a Bavarian aristocrat and the commander of Wehrkreis XII; General of Cavalry Guenther von Pogrell, the inspector of cavalry; General Kurt Liese, the chief of ordnance; Lieutenant General Guenther von Niebelschuetz, the strongly anti-Nazi inspector of army schools; and several lesser lights. Goering took advantage of the purge to clean house. Four senior officers, Generals of Fliers Hans Halm, Edmund Wachenfeld, Leonhard Kaupisch, and Helmut Wilberg, were retired. The six *Luftkreisekommando* headquarters were combined into three new Luftwaffe Group commands, which became the first German air fleet headquarters the following year. In the first day of the purge, 13 army and Luftwaffe generals were retired and 22 were transferred to other positions.[8] Among those to go was Oswald Lutz, the first general of panzer troops, whom Hitler sacked so that he could move Heinz Guderian up to the command of the XVI (Panzer) Corps. Lutz's dismissal was particularly tasteless. He first heard of it when he read it in the newspapers.[9] Naturally, Friedrich Hossbach was dismissed as Armed Forces Adjutant to the Fuehrer, because he had deliberately disobeyed orders and informed Fritsch of the allegations against him.

There were promotions and advancements that week as well. Hermann Goering, who was disappointed that he was not named war

minister, was promoted to field marshal as a sort of consolation prize. Luftwaffe Group 1 (East), headquartered in Berlin, was given to Kesselring, and Luftwaffe Group 3 (South) went to Sperrle. Luftwaffe Group 2 (West) went to Helmuth Felmy, who was promoted to general of fliers shortly thereafter. Eight army officers were promoted from lieutenant general to general: Gustav von Wietersheim, Walter Schroth, Walter Kuntze, Franz Halder, von Schwelder, Konrad von Gossler, Ritter Eugen von Schobert, and Ernst Busch, a strong Nazi. These promotions were followed shortly thereafter by Heinz Guderian, who was promoted to general of panzer troops. List replaced Leeb at Army Group 2 and Busch succeeded Kleist at Wehrkreis VIII in Silesia. In the Luftwaffe, Greim, Bodenschatz, Guenther Ruedel, Jeschonnek, Joseph Kammhuber, and others received promotions or more important assignments.

Few generals stood tall during the purge. Heinz Guderian, for example, did not utter a word of protest when his friend and mentor, Oswald Lutz, was arbitrarily sacked, and seems to have been delighted to assume his vacant chair, although he did stand by Baron von Fritsch. Rundstedt and Fedor von Bock did not protest to the dismissals and were promoted to colonel general a few weeks later. Only Ludwig Beck and Wilhelm Adam registered significant objections.

Some generals escaped the initial purge, but instead were retired in November 1938. These included General of Infantry Hermann Geyer, the commander of Wehrkreis V; General of Cavalry Wilhelm Knochenhauer, commander of Wehrkreis X; General of Artillery Wilhelm Ulex, the commander of Wehrkreis XI; and Gerd von Rundstedt, the commander-in-chief of Army Group 1. Franz Halder was saved from involuntary retirement only by the intervention of Wilhelm Keitel.

In all, 16 senior generals were retired and 44 were transferred, mostly out of Berlin. The most significant difference between this purge and the one in progress in the Soviet Union was, of course, that Hitler's highly skilled generals were still alive. None of them suffered Nazi harassment or persecution in retirement, although some of them were kept under discreet observation by the Gestapo. Most of these officers were recalled to active duty when the outbreak of World War II was imminent.[10] One can imagine what they thought of Walter von Brauchitsch when they returned.

Simultaneously with the purge of the army, Hitler purged the German diplomatic corps. Foreign Minister Baron von Neurath, who had worked in the foreign service in various capacities since 1901, was replaced by Joachim von Ribbentrop, a former champagne salesman, of whom Joseph Goebbels remarked: ''Von Ribbentrop bought his name, he married his money, and he swindled his way to office.''[11] His appointment was probably the worst selection Hitler made during his entire career, and that is a devastating indictment of Ribbentrop's

performance as foreign minister. He was a major factor in the outbreak of World War II and the ensuing German disaster.

Several other professional diplomats were also ousted, including Christian Albrecht Ulrich von Hassell, the ambassador to Italy, and Herbert Dirksen, the ambassador to Japan. Hans-Georg von Mackensen, the son of the field marshal and Neurath's state secretary since the death of von Buelow, was sent to Rome to replace von Hassell—a definite demotion.

On February 4, 1938, in the last cabinet meeting in the history of the Third Reich, Adolf Hitler (who had been Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces since 1933) now assumed Blomberg's old post of commander-in-chief of the armed forces as well. He abolished the War Ministry and appointed Wilhelm Keitel commander-in-chief of OKW.

Keitel organized OKW into four sections: the Armed Forces Operations Staff (*Fuehrungstab* or WFA), the *Abwehr* (Intelligence and Counterespionage Office), the Armed Forces Central Office, and the Armed Forces Economic Office. The Operations Staff was the most important sector, and it was initially headed by Lieutenant General Max von Viebahn, Leeb's former chief of staff at Army Group 2 and the former commander of the 34th Infantry Division. The Abwehr was headed by Rear Admiral Wilhelm Canaris;[12] pro-Nazi Colonel Hermann Reinecke directed the Central Office; and Major General Georg Thomas was chief of the Armed Forces Economic Office. This was not a talented cast of subordinates—in fact, taken as a whole, they were quite marginal. In addition, Keitel never felt equal to his own high office, and, in fact, he was not, as he was a hard working man but not particularly bright. Most of his peers called him ''the blockhead'' or ''the nodding ass.''[13] Keitel must have realized that he had been promoted beyond his capabilities, which may explain why he was content to follow the guidance of Adolf Hitler in almost all matters. Hitler, after praising his loyalty, once remarked that Keitel had the ''brains of a cinema usher,'' but then he did not want a military genius of the caliber of Erich von Manstein or Erwin Rommel in this post; all he wanted was a man who would obey his orders without question. As a result, Keitel was promoted to colonel general on November 1, 1938, and remained commander-in-chief of OKW until the very end.

The brightest man on the OKW staff was probably Colonel Albert Jodl, who was named deputy chief of operations at OKW in early 1938. A young man (he was 41 at the time), he was a Bavarian artillery officer who was able and basically decent, but a an ambitious, reserved person with narrow views who unfortunately regarded Hitler as a genius. He showed steadier nerves than his Fuehrer during the Norwegian crisis of 1940, a fact that was not lost on Hitler; after that, Jodl became Hitler's primary source of military knowledge. Unfortunately

for Nazi Germany in World War II, the fact that a military officer of such high caliber submitted himself so totally to the Fuehrer reinforced Hitler's already too high estimation of his own martial abilities and tended to intensify his already excessive obstinacy.

Keitel's dream of setting up a *real* Armed Forces High Command (that is, one with operational command over the army, air force, and navy) was short-lived, because the other two branches refused to cooperate. Goering made his attitude quite clear when he wrote to Keitel personally, saying:

> Whether (and it is in regard to this point that I would like to put it most emphatically) these orders are signed ''In the name of the Fuehrer, Keitel, Colonel General'' or ''In the name of the Fuehrer, Maier, Staff Sergeant'' is completely irrelevant as far as I am concerned.[14]

Admiral Raeder expressed himself in more diplomatic terms, but the navy also went its own way. The army, however, could not. Five years after his rise to power, it was finally under Hitler's thumb. The Nazi dictator could now pursue his aggressive designs without serious opposition.

Walter von Brauchitsch quickly lost whatever small standing he had at Fuehrer Headquarters. Within five weeks of taking office, he tried to renege on his agreement to accept the OKW-dominated command structure. He supported the efforts of Ludwig Beck, chief of the General Staff, and Erich von Manstein, the brilliant deputy chief of the General Staff for operations (*Oberquartiermeister* I), who submitted a memorandum propagating that the army have predominance in any joint command (that is, Wehrmacht). Keitel, strongly supported by Goering, successfully resisted this proposal, and Brauchitsch began to fall in Hitler's eyes. Manstein was soon exiled from Berlin and transferred from the General Staff, but he was considered too brilliant to retire, so he was given command of the 18th Infantry Division at Liegnitz. He was replaced by Franz Halder, a Bavarian artillery officer.

A sequel to the events of February 1938 occurred a year later, and it demonstrates the depths of Brauchitsch's hypocrisy. A young lieutenant impregnated a girl from a good family. He immediately offered to do the honorable thing and marry her, but this did not satisfy Brauchitsch, who held others to extremely high moral standards. He at once petitioned to dismiss the unfortunate young officer from the service. In 1939, such a petition still required the signature of the supreme commander of the armed forces, so Brauchitsch submitted it to Hitler, against the advise of Colonel Rudolf Schmundt, army adjutant to the Fuehrer. Schmundt was right. When he read the document, Hitler became angry. This was typical of generals like Brauchitsch, he

snapped: he carried on an adulterous affair with his second wife while still married to his first, and yet he wanted to ruin the career of a young man who was behaving more honorably than Brauchitsch himself had done. Hitler set the dismissal aside, saved the career of the lieutenant, and instructed Brauchitsch to apply the same moral standards to his subordinates that he applied to himself. Hitler might also have mentioned that, unlike Brauchitsch, the young lieutenant had not taken any bribes.

NOTES

1. A full English translation of the Hossbach Memorandum, describing the conference, can be found in *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series D (1949), vol. 1, pp. 29–39 (hereafter cited as *DGFP*). The German original and a mediocre translation are found in IMT, vol. 25, pp. 402–13, and PS-386, respectively. Colonel Hossbach was born in 1894, was educated in cadet schools, and entered the service as a Faehnrich (senior officer cadet) in 1913. He fought in World War I, served in the Reichswehr, and became Hitler's adjutant in 1934. He later commanded the 82nd Infantry Regiment (1938–39), served as chief of staff of III Corps (September 30 to December 1, 1939), was acting commander of the 31st Infantry Division (early 1942), commanded the 82nd Infantry Division (1942–43) and the 31st Infantry Division (May–August 1943). He then led the LVI Panzer Corps (1943–44) and the 4th Army on the Eastern Front (July 19, 1944 to January 28, 1945). He surrendered to the Western Allies in May 1945. Discharged from the prisoner-of-war camps in 1947, he settled to Goettingen (the former home station of his 82nd Infantry Regiment) and died in 1980 at age 86.

2. David Irving, *The War Path: Hitler's Germany, 1933–1939* (1979) (hereafter cited as Irving, *War Path*).

3. O'Neill, p. 142.

4. Wilhelm Keitel, *In the Service of the Reich*, Walter Goerlitz, ed. (1966), p. 23 (hereafter cited as Keitel).

5. Harold C. Deutsch, *Hitler and His Generals: The Hidden Crisis, January-June, 1938* (1978), p. 221.

6. Ibid., p. 222.

7. Telford Taylor, *Sword and Swastika* (1952; reprint ed., 1969), p. 61 (hereafter cited as Taylor, *Sword and Swastika*).

8. Taylor, *Sword and Swastika*, pp. 170-71, 238; John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918–1945* (1964; reprint ed., 1967), p. 373 (hereafter cited as Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis*); Irving, *War Path*, p. 161.

9. Lutz headed a minor special staff in the Replacement Army in 1941, but he never received another important assignment. He died in Munich on February 26, 1944.

10. Wilhelm Knochenhauser was not reemployed because his health failed. He died in Hamburg on June 28, 1939. Apparently General Liese died before that, as his name disappears from the records after early 1938.

11. Louis L. Snyder, *Hitler's Elite* (1989), p. 155 (hereafter cited as Snyder, *Hitler's Elite*).

12. Canaris was promoted to vice admiral on April 1, 1938, and to admiral on January 1, 1940. Hildebrand and Henriot, vol. 1, p. 199.

13. Albert Seaton, *The Russo-German War, 1941–1945* (1970), p. 27 (hereafter cited as Seaton, *Russo-German War*).

14. Suchenwirth, ''Command.''

CHAPTER IX
THE ANSCHLUSS

The idea of a political union (*Anschluss*) between Germany and Austria began decades before Adolf Hitler was born. Indeed, in 1867, following his victory over the Hapsburg monarchy in the Austro-Prussian War, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck of Prussia had to settled the issue of whether or not the German-speaking Austrians should be incorporated into the Second Reich. Bismarck decided in favor of a *Kleindeutschland* (small Germany) instead of a *Grossdeutschland* (Greater Germany), largely because he felt that the Austrians would make an effective counterweight to the Slavs in the Balkans. But Bismarck's decision did not settle the matter forever.

The Republic of Austria was created from the German fragment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of World War I. It was soon apparent that the victorious Allies intended to treat the German-speaking Austrians just like they treated the Reich: as a vanquished foe who warranted little consideration and deserved to be punished. In its final form, Austria had an area of 32,000 square miles and contained nine provinces: Upper and Lower Austria, Burgenland, Styria, Salzburg, Carinthia, Tyrol, Vorarlberg, and Vienna. Its factories were separated from most of their sources of raw materials and associated industries. The Styrian iron and steel industry, for example, lost its Silesian and Bohemian coal, which went to Poland and Czechoslovakia, and Austria's petroleum, which had come from Galacia, went to Poland. Also, Austrian industries had previously served an empire of 54 million people; now they served fewer than 7 million, and the Successor States raised high tariff barriers against their neighbor, giving Austria little possibility of exporting to her former provinces. In addition, Vienna's banking and commercial sectors had also been set up to meet the needs of a great empire, rather than those of a tiny, landlocked country. They quickly floundered after the dissolution of the empire. Finally, Austria had lost much of its good agricultural land

and, in 1919, was able to produce only two-thirds of its wheat demands, one-third of its barley, and one-fifth of its oats. Indeed, despite the gradual economic improvement Austria underwent after 1924, there was still serious doubt concerning the country's viability, which became a major political issue from 1919 to 1938 and one of which the Nazis took full advantage. In a sense, questioning Austria's viability was a self-fulfilling prophecy, because the Austrian pessimism about the country's future naturally discouraged foreign investment. Consequently, Austrian industry could not raise enough capital to expand, which, in turn, contributed to the chronically high unemployment rate.[1]

Political tensions between Austria and the Third Reich existed from the beginning, but Adolf Hitler did not force a showdown until February 12, 1938, when he met Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg at Berchtesgaden and subjected him to a fierce browbeating. ''I have only to give an order, and in one single night all of your ridiculous defense mechanisms are blown to bits,'' he yelled at the Austrian. ''You don't seriously believe that you can stop me or even delay me for half an hour, do you?'' He then threatened to invade Austria, reminded Schuschnigg of Austria's diplomatic isolation, and demanded that the persecution of Nazis in Austria be ended, ''or else I shall put an end to it.''[2] Hitler recalled in May 1942: ''I won't ever forget how Schuschnigg shrivelled up when I told him to get rid of those silly little barricades facing our frontier, as otherwise I was going to send in a couple of engineer battalions to clear them for him.''[3] Later, back in Vienna, Schuschnigg commented that Hitler ''would have been locked up in a sanatorium long ago if he had stayed here in Austria.''[4] Before he left, however, Schuschnigg was intimidated into signing a document that turned partial control of the government over to the Austrian Nazis. Among other things, Dr. Artur Seyss-Inquart was nominated for the post of minister of the interior, which would give him control of the police. General Edmund von Glaise-Horstenau was to become minister of war, and Dr. Hans Fischboeck (another Nazi) was to become finance minister.

Under the Austrian constitution, the prime minister could not appoint cabinet ministers—only the president could do that. Hitler gave Schuschnigg until February 18 to get the appointments confirmed or the Wehrmacht would smash the Austrian Army.

Immediately upon his return to the Austrian capital on the morning of February 13, 1938, Schuschnigg sought out President Wilhelm Miklas, who has been described as ''a plodding, mediocre man'' whose chief accomplishment in life had been to father 14 children.[5] Miklas, however, showed more courage than anyone else during the Austrian crisis. He refused to put Seyss-Inquart in charge of the police or put Glaise-Horstenau in charge of the army. Schuschnigg informed Berlin

of Miklas's attitude on February 14. That evening Hitler approved orders from Keitel, creating a military diversion that simulated preparations for a German invasion of Austria. These preparations, which were directed by Admiral Canaris, had the desired effect: Milkas backed down and confirmed Seyss-Inquart's appointment.

This move only further worsened the Austrian domestic situation. Another wave of political violence struck the country, and the police (now directed by the Nazis) did nothing. The army had to be called in to restore order.

Throughout the country, political and economic chaos was setting in. Schuschnigg, meanwhile, came up with an idea to stem the Nazi tide. On the evening of March 9, he announced in a speech at Innsbruck that a national plebiscite would be held in four days (on Sunday, March 13). The question the voters would be asked was: ''Are you in favor of a free, independent, social, Christian and united Austria—yes or no?'' This move, Schuschnigg knew, would give opposition groups no time to organize or campaign. Also, because the Nazi Party was primarily a party of young people, he arbitrarily raised the voting age from 21 to 24. Finally, because there had been no free elections in Austria since 1933, there were no up-to-date voter registration lists. Who could or could not vote would be largely determined by Schuschnigg's own party. He would be virtually assured of receiving the mandate he sought.

The Innsbruck speech took Hitler by surprise and immediately threw him into a rage. That night he called for Goering; von Reichenau, who had recently succeeded Brauchitsch as commander of Army Group 4; General of Infantry Ritter Eugen von Schobert, the commander of Wehrkreis VII, headquartered at Munich; General von Glaise-Horstenau, Hitler's nominee for Austrian minister of war; and the recently dismissed Baron von Neurath, who was told to take over again as acting foreign minister, since Ribbentrop was in London and would remain there throughout the crisis. (Reichenau was at a Cairo, Egypt, meeting of the Olympic Committee and could not make it back in time to attend this conference.)[6] During the discussion, Hitler told them to be prepared to exercise the military option to prevent the plebiscite.

The following day, Thursday, March 10, Hitler summoned Keitel to the Reichschancellery. Before he left, however, Keitel conferred with General Max von Viebahn, the chief of the OKW operations staff, and his deputy, Colonel Jodl, about the possible invasion of Austria. Keitel asked what contingency plans existed for an invasion of Austria. Jodl retrieved an old plan, Special Case Otto, which had been drawn up in case the Austrians attempted to place Otto of Hapsburg on the throne. This was the only alternative Keitel could offer when he met with the Fuehrer that morning, and because it was the only plan available,

Hitler ordered it prepared. He set the provisional date for the invasion as Saturday, March 12—less than two days away.

After his meeting with Hitler, Keitel rushed to the Bendlerstrasse to confer with General Beck. When he asked for the details of Case Otto, Beck replied: ''We have prepared nothing, nothing has been done, nothing at all.''[7] Naturally, Beck himself was soon summoned to the Reichschancellery. On the way, he grabbed Erich von Manstein, who was about to leave to assume command of the 18th Infantry Division in Liegnitz. The two met with Hitler, who told them that the army must be ready to march by Saturday.

Back at his office at 1 P.M., the brilliant von Manstein went to work drafting plans and issuing orders. By 6 P.M., he had created an invasion plan, almost from scratch. Orders for the mobilization of three army corps and the Luftwaffe went out at 6:30 P.M. The forces to be employed included Luftwaffe Group 3 under Hugo Sperrle, Ritter von Schobert's VII Corps, Baron von Weichs' XIII Corps, and Guderian's XVI Motorized Corps, which consisted of the 2nd Panzer Division and Dietrich's Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler. All units (including Sperrle's) were to be subordinate to Colonel General Fedor von Bock's Army Group 3, which would be designated 8th Army for the invasion.

Meanwhile, the diplomats had not been idle. That afternoon, Hitler sent Prince Philip of Hesse to Rome with a letter to Mussolini, telling him of his plans and asking for his understanding. The letter declared that the boundary between Italy and Germany was the Brenner Pass (that is, telling the Duce that he would never claim the southern Tyrol, even though the vast majority of its population was German). In the meantime, military operations continued.

Kurt von Schuschnigg was awakened when his telephone rang at 5:30 A.M. on Friday, March 11. Dr. Michael Skubl, the chief of the Austrian police, informed him that the Germans had closed the border at Salzburg and halted rail traffic between the two countries, and that German troops were concentrating on the border. Schuschnigg tried to contact Ambassador Franz von Papen, but he could not be found. Meanwhile, Seyss-Inquart left Berlin for Vienna by special airplane. With him he carried an order from Hitler, instructing Schuschnigg to call off the plebiscite.

Artur Seyss-Inquart and General von Glaise-Horstenau presented Hitler's orders to Chancellor von Schuschnigg at 10 A.M. It was a clear ultimatum. After four hours of consultations with Miklas, his cabinet, and Dr. Skubl, Schuschnigg agreed to cancel the plebiscite. Skubl had informed him that the government could no longer count on the police because, in accordance with the Berchtesgaden agreement, it had been opened up to the Nazis. Also, Schuschnigg was reluctant to spill German blood. He telephoned the news to Seyss-Inquart at 2 P.M.

Forty-five minutes later, Seyss-Inquart telephoned the news to Goering in Berlin. He and Hitler then employed the same tactics they would use later at Munich. Goering informed the minister of the interior that cancellation of the plebiscite was no longer enough. He would speak with Hitler and call him back with the new conditions.

Goering called back at 3:05 P.M. Schuschnigg must resign and Seyss-Inquart must be named chancellor, he said. Furthermore, Schuschnigg was to be given only two hours to meet the latest Nazi demands. The Luftwaffe field marshal then told Seyss-Inquart who he would appoint to his cabinet. The list included General von Glaise-Horstenau, vice chancellor and minister of war; Dr. Fischboeck, minister of economics; Ernst Kaltenbrunner, minister of internal security; and Goering's own brother-in-law, Dr. Franz Hueber, minister of justice and foreign affairs.

Seyss-Inquart went to Schuschnigg, who told him that he was willing to resign as chancellor. Miklas, however, refused to appoint Seyss-Inquart in his place. He instructed Schuschnigg to tell Berlin that its ultimatum was rejected.

Seyss-Inquart relayed Miklas's message to Goering at 5:30 P.M. The Fat One ordered Seyss-Inquart to go the president with Lieutenant General Wolfgang Muff, the German military attaché to Vienna, and tell him if Hitler's conditions were not immediately accepted, the troops already on the frontier would cross the border all along the line. Seyss-Inquart and Muff did as they were told, although the general, an officer of the old school, had enough class to be clearly embarrassed that he was being used as a messenger boy in this situation by Hitler and the Nazis. In any case, Miklas still refused to give way. Meanwhile, a crowd of 100,000 noisy Nazis of both sexes demonstrated outside the Austrian Chancellery.

General Muff and Wilhelm Keppler, Hitler's special agent in Austria, presented Miklas with a second ultimatum from Berlin at 6:30 P.M. If he did not yield and appoint Seyss-Inquart chancellor by 7:30 P.M., it said, the German Army would march. By this time, it was clear that order in the Austrian capital had broken down. Unhampered by the police, the Nazis had control of the government quarter and the Chancellery building. Schuschnigg begged Miklas to reconsider, but the president was adamant. Schuschnigg then proposed that he make a farewell broadcast to the nation and explain why he had resigned. According to Schuschnigg, Miklas agreed to this request, although the old president later denied it. In any case, at 7 P.M., Kurt von Schuschnigg made a moving address to the nation, during which he announced that he and Miklas were yielding to force. This was not true, for Miklas had not yet yielded, but now everyone thought he had. His position was so badly undercut by the Schuschnigg

announcement that further resistance was useless. At 10:48 P.M.—15 minute after Adolf Hitler signed the order to start the invasion of Austria the following morning—Keppler telephoned the Reichschancellery in Berlin. Miklas had finally capitulated. He had dissolved the government and ordered the Austrian Army not to resist. By 10 P.M. a telegram signed by Seyss-Inquart arrived in Berlin, calling for the German Army to intervene in Austria. It had probably been sent by Keppler, but this is not certain.

Another important telephone call reached the Reichschancellery at 10:25 P.M. This one was from Prince Philip of Hesse, Hitler's special envoy to Rome, who told Hitler that Mussolini had said that what happened in Austria was immaterial to him. The Fuehrer was beside himself with joy. With its protector gone, Vienna was helpless, and there was nothing further that could stop the Anschluss. ''Tell Mussolini I will never forget him for this,'' the Fuehrer babbled into the receiver. ''Never, never, never, no matter what happens.'' He went on in this vein for some time and, surprisingly, it was one of the few promises he made to which he remained absolutely loyal, even when it was not in his best interests (or those of Germany) to do so.

Mussolini had, in fact, been ''floored'' by the news of what Hitler was planning. ''That damn German,'' had been his initial reaction.[8] Nevertheless, he quickly fell into line.

Internationally, Hitler's diplomacy had been totally successful, and his timing both impeccable and lucky. Austria was now completely isolated. France at that moment was undergoing one of its domestic political convulsions and was, in fact, without a government. In London, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden had resigned on February 20, mainly because of his opposition to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's policy of further appeasement, and had been replaced by Lord Halifax—a change that was welcomed in Berlin. All London did was send a strong protest on March 12. The government of Czechoslovakia exhibited great timidity and the Czech ambassador promised Hermann Goering that Prague would not mobilize.

Back in Vienna, Miklas spoke to London and Paris, and realized the game was up. A little before midnight, feeling abandoned, he finally gave in, appointed Seyss-Inquart chancellor and accepted his cabinet. The following morning, the German army, spearheaded by the 2nd Panzer Division, crossed the border into Austria. About the same time, General Wilhelm Zehner, the Austrian minister of war, was assassinated in his apartment in Vienna. He was almost certainly murdered by the Gestapo.

At the same time, in Berlin, Lieutenant General Max von Viebahn, the chief of operations of OKW, snapped completely. He was alternately praying loudly and predicting disaster, just as the dangerous situation completely dissipated in Hitler's favor. When Colonel Jodl told

him to get a grip on himself, he suffered a nervous breakdown. He barricaded himself in his office in the war ministry, threw ink bottles at the door, and threatened to shoot anyone who tried to come in. He was eventually calmed, subdued, and given professional help. He was replaced by Alfred Jodl.

That same night, the panzers left Linz for Vienna. Despite the fact that there was no resistance, it was not an easy march, because it was snowing, and the road was torn up for miles. At least 50 tanks broke down, the advanced guard did not reach the capital until after midnight, and the column was strung out for miles. Guderian later admitted that 30 percent of his tanks broke down, and some authorities suggest that the number may have been considerably higher. General von Bock was very angry over the lack of dependability of the German tanks and did not utter a single word of praise for Guderian or his units during the entire operation.

Meanwhile, Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart, state secretary in the ministry of the interior, presented the Anschluss law to the new government in Vienna. Miklas refused to sign it, but Seyss-Inquart did. He then officially announced that Miklas had resigned from office, and that his functions were therefore transferred to the chancellor. Seyss-Inquart was lying, for Miklas had done no such thing, but it really did not matter. Austria was dead. Heydrich had already installed himself on the Morinplatz, where his agents were examining records seized from the Austrian Secret Service.

Adolf Hitler entered Vienna, a city he hated, in triumph on the afternoon of Monday, March 14. Because of the crowds on the road to the capital, his cavalcade could only go forward at a crawl in many places and could average only 20 mph. He did not enter the capital city until almost 5 P.M. Here every building, including churches, flew the Austrian and swastika flags. The welcome was overwhelming and the arrests had already begun. In Vienna alone, 79,000 people would be picked up in the next few weeks.

The German Army rapidly incorporated the generally pro-Nazi Austrian Army into the Wehrmacht. This task was not made any easier by the arrogant and humorless German commander, General von Bock, who was openly contemptuous of all things Austrian. He acted in a manner that was deliberately offensive to almost everybody, including Hermann Goering. Bock haughtily refused to share a reviewing stand with him on the grounds that he was a civilian and therefore, like the Austrians, was beneath contempt. He alienated the Austrian military officers by referring to their World War I decorations as ''pieces of tin.'' By the end of the month, Bock and his staff had been sent back to Dresden. His behavior had done the tactless Prussian's career no harm, however, because Adolf Hitler shared his dislike for Austrians.

Meanwhile, in Vienna, Army Group 5 was established under the more diplomatic Siegmund Wilhelm List, a Bavarian, to integrate the former Austrian Army into the armed forces of the Reich. He set up two new Wehrkreise: the XVII in Vienna and the XVIII at Salzburg. Wehrkreis XVII included the newly formed 44th and 45th Infantry Divisions, headquartered at Vienna and Linz, respectively, while Wehrkreis XVIII consisted of the 2nd and 3rd Mountain Divisions, respectively based in Innsbruck and Graz. List retained the 2nd Panzer Division (directly under army group command) and established a new light division (the 4th) from Austrian cavalry and motorized components. The 4th Light was initially headquartered in Vienna, but it was later sent to St. Poelten, where it eventually became part of the XIX Motorized Corps.

Many Austrian officers were taken into the German military with no loss of rank or seniority, although many of them were required to attend German service schools, and several Austrian units were sent to the Reich for training. A mixed commission of German and Austrian officers was set up under the chairmanship of Wolfgang Muff (who had been promoted to general of infantry as of March 25), to screen Austrian officers for political reliability before incorporating them into the Wehrmacht. General Sigmund Schilhausky, the inspector general of the Austrian Army, was abruptly sacked on March 15, and about half of the Austrian generals and colonels were either dismissed from the service or retired with their pensions. About 30 of these officers ended up in concentration camps. Only about 20 percent of the field- and company-grade Austrian officers were forced out of the service.

General List facilitated the task of integration by alternating German and Austrian officers in his higher headquarters. German commanders, he decreed, would have Austrian chiefs of staff and vice versa. For example, newly promoted General of Infantry Werner Kienitz, a German, was named commander of Wehrkreis XVII, while Colonel Dr. Lothar Rendulic, an Austrian, became his chief of staff. Eugen Beyer, a former lieutenant field marshal in the Austrian Army, was appointed general of infantry and given command of Wehrkreis XVIII.[9] His chief of staff was a German. Meanwhile, General of Fliers Alexander Loehr, the former commander-in-chief of the Austrian Air Force, became the leader of Luftwaffe Command Austria.

While the Wehrmacht absorbed its new forces and the people of Austria found out what Anschluss with Nazi Germany really meant, Adolf Hitler himself returned to Berlin, his appetite for conquest whetted by his bloodless victories in the Rhineland and Austria. A quick look at a map would allow any competent observer to predict his next victim: Czechoslovakia.

NOTES

1. Bruce F. Pauley, *Hitler and the Forgotten Nazis: A History of the Austrian National Socialism* (1989), pp. 4–7.
2. Schuschnigg, *Requiem*, pp. 12–20.
3. Irving, *War Path*, p. 75, citing Hitler's Conversations.
4. Irving, *War Path*, p. 77.
5. Shirer, p. 33.
6. See *NCA*, vol. 4, p. 362.
7. Shirer, p. 335.
8. Toland, *Hitler*, p. 619.
9. Werner Kienitz was born in 1885 and joined the army as a Fahnenjunker in 1904. During World War I, he served as a company commander in the 64th Infantry Regiment (1914–15) and as a General Staff officer (1915–18). Retained in the Reichsheer, he commanded the 15th Infantry Regiment (1932–34), Frontier Guard Sector Stuttgart (1934–35), and the 24th Infantry Division (1935–38) before assuming command of Wehrkreis XVII. He led the XVII Corps during the Polish and Russian campaigns (1939–early 1942) before assuming command of Wehrkreis II at Stettin in May 1942. He remained here until the Soviets overran Pomerania in early 1945. Kienitz surrendered to the Western Allies at the end of the war. Released in 1947, he retired to Hamburg, where he died in 1959.

Eugen Beyer led the active duty components of Wehrkreis XVIII (that is, XVIII Corps) in the Polish and French campaigns. He reported himself ill on June 5, 1940, and died in Salzburg on July 25, at the age of 58. His corps was redesignated XVIII Mountain Corps later that year.

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CHAPTER X

THE SUDETENLAND CRISIS

The Czechoslovak Republic, which Adolf Hitler hated so much, was established during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Among other non-Czech areas, the new country was given the Sudetenland, which was populated mainly by Germans. The reason for this was primarily military: the Czechs wanted the protection of the Bohemian Mountains in their border zones with Germany. The Allies ignored the Wilsonian principle of self-determination in drawing the new boundaries, and Czechoslovakia became an ethnic jigsaw puzzle and a miniature Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1930 it had, according to the census, 7,447,000 Czechs, 2,309,000 Slovaks, 2,231,000 Germans, 691,900 Magyars, 549,000 Ruthenians, and 81,700 Poles. Many of these citizens wanted their own, independent country or at least their own autonomous region. The Poles wanted to be part of Poland, the Magyars wanted to return to Hungary, and the Germans wanted to become part of the Third Reich. All of the minorities resented the discrimination, high-handedness, and petty tyrannies of the Czech government and its local representatives.

The unofficial branch of the Nazi Party in the Sudetenland was formed in October 1933, as the Sudeten German *Heimatfront* (Patriotic Front), which changed its name to the *Sudetendeutsche Partie* (SDP) in 1935. It was founded and led by Konrad Henlein, the son of a Czech mother and a German father. On March 28, 1938, Henlein met with Hitler, Ribbentrop, General of Fliers Loerzer, and Nazi Party chief Rudolf Hess at the Reichschancellery in Berlin. During the three-hour conference, Hitler confirmed Henlein as the sole leader of the German minority in Czechoslovakia and promised that some day he would be his *Statthalter* (governor). He also instructed the SDP to always ''demand so much [from the Czech government] that we can never be satisfied,'' as Henlein reported to his subordinates.[1] The party was to remain in parliamentary opposition and refuse to participate in the

government, no matter what compromises Prague offered, and was to avoid any action that might give foreign observers the impression that a solution to the ''Sudetenland problem'' had been found. The Sudeten and German Nazis pursued this policy until the end—and pushed Europe to the brink of war in the process.

The German Army began planning for possible action against Czechoslovakia in late April 1935, when Baron von Fritsch spoke to Werner von Blomberg about the dangers the new relationship between Prague and the Soviet Union and France presented to Germany. On May 2, Blomberg issued Secret Order *Schulung* to the three service chiefs, instructing them to begin operational planning for an attack against Czechoslovakia, with a simultaneous defensive deployment against France. Several authors have cited this order as ''proof'' of Germany's aggressive designs against Czechoslovakia. This is not true—that came later. Planning for Schulung was based on the hypothesis that France and Italy had already attacked Germany, and that Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union had joined the conflict on the side of Paris. The principle objective of Schulung was the seizure of the Russo-Czechoslovak air bases that could be used against Germany's cities. Schulung, therefore, was strategically defensive in nature and a prudent and sensible military study under the circumstances. Ludwig Beck, the chief of the General Staff, was nevertheless absolutely horrified by it and threatened to resign if the projected operation was more than a strictly theoretical study.[2] In any case, Blomberg did not draw up Case Green, the code name for the attack on Czechoslovakia, until June 24, 1937, and even this study was not completed for months. It called for a lightning attack (*Blitzkrieg*) after a period of diplomatic friction, climaxed by a dramatic incident, such as the assassination of the German ambassador. During the Hossbach Conference of November 5, 1937, Hitler ordered the General Staff to produce a complete version of Case Green in 1938. It was only after the Anschluss, however, that an aggressive military confrontation with Prague became a viable strategic possibility.

The German annexation of Austria fundamentally changed the strategic situation in central Europe. The Austrian Army, with a strength of seven infantry divisions and several smaller cavalry and motorized units, ceased to exist, and the German Army increased its strength by about the same amount. More important, the Czech-German border was extended by 250 miles (it had previously been less than 700 miles long), and only the western 100 miles were mountainous. The remaining 150 miles were mostly rolling terrain, which was good for panzer operations although somewhat protected by rivers. Even more important was the fact that Bohemia and Moravia were almost encircled by the Third Reich, and only 125 miles of Czech territory lay between

Silesia and the northern border of Ostmark. One major German breakthrough, therefore, would threaten to split the country in two. Even so, Prague's strategic position was far from hopeless. She was a vital part of the French alliance system, had a mutual assistance agreement with the Soviet Union (contingent on French intervention), and had a powerful army. In all, Czechoslovakia had 17 regular peacetime divisions, with 15 more available upon mobilization. In addition, it had four independent regiments (holding fortified positions), four tank regiments and six air regiments. Finally, in early 1938, the Czechoslovak Army was in the process of forming four new, mobile divisions, to replace its three old-fashioned cavalry brigades.

Another military consideration was that most of the Czechoslovak units were well equipped—many of them better so than their German counterparts. The Czechoslovak military-industrial establishment was a formidable factor in 1938. Especially important was the Skoda Works at Pilsen, which produced huge quantities of equipment, including the T-38 tank—a vehicle superior to either the PzKw I or PzKw II. It was distinctly inferior to the PzKw III, but only a handful of these tanks had reached the panzer regiments by early 1938. The only major weakness of the Czech military-industrial complex was that Pilsen lay only a little more than 30 miles from the German border and was exposed to German air attack.

THE "CZECH PROBLEM" AND THE MAY CRISIS

Shortly after noon on May 20, the German envoy in Prague sent an urgent message to Berlin, telling von Ribbentrop that the Czech government was alarmed by reports of German troop concentrations in Saxony. That afternoon, the Czechs called a partial mobilization (200,000 men) and caused tremendous excitement throughout Europe. In Berchtesgaden and Berlin, Hitler and Ribbentrop were bombarded by continual warnings from London and Paris that aggressive action against Czechoslovakia would lead to a general European war, and the Soviet Union announced its willingness to aid in fighting Nazi Germany. Keitel and the Wilhelmstrasse denied that any such troop concentrations existed, but, since Berlin had given Britain similar assurances during the Anschluss, and these had turned out to be lies, British Ambassador Sir Neville Henderson did not believe them now. He almost threatened Ribbentrop (whom he did not like) and sent the British military attaché and his deputy to Saxony and Silesia, to investigate the situation.

There were no troop concentrations. Hitler and Ribbentrop, for once, were telling nothing but the truth. In the eyes of the world, however,

Hitler had been found guilty already. The Fuehrer (then at Berchtesgaden, his home in the Bavarian Alps) was furious about the accusations hurled at him by the international media and was in a foul mood for days. As a result of the May Crisis, he had been humiliated on the stage of world opinion, and he had no trouble attributing the blame to pure malicious intent on the part of the Czechs. On Monday, May 23, he swallowed his pride and ordered the foreign ministry to assure the Czech envoy that the reports about German troop concentrations were not true and the Third Reich planned no aggressive actions against Czechoslovakia. The world breathed a collective sigh of relief. The crisis, it thought, had passed.

The crisis was, in fact, only just beginning. ''The world press,'' Weizsaecker wrote later, ''by spreading the story that Hitler had yielded to foreign pressure ... really set Hitler going. From then on he [was] emphatically in favor of settling the Czech question by force of arms.''[3] Schmidt added, ''Anyone deliberately planning to madden Hitler could have thought of no better method.''[4]

On May 28, the dictator suddenly appeared in Berlin and called his top military lieutenant to the Reichschancellery. Present were Keitel, Goering, von Brauchitsch, Beck, and Raeder, as well as von Ribbentrop and von Neurath, who was now a minister without a portfolio. The determined Fuehrer ordered that full military preparations—not just planning—for the invasion of Czechoslovakia be completed by October 1 at the latest. The construction of the West Wall was to be greatly accelerated and the mobilization of 96 divisions was to be planned. ''It is my unshakable will,'' he declared, ''that Czechoslovakia shall be wiped off the map!''[5]

Hitler's decision caused a rift between himself and some of his generals. Ludwig Beck, the cautious and conservative chief of the General Staff, was especially disturbed. He had already gone on record as opposing a war with the Western Allies, and on May 5, he had sent a memorandum to Brauchitsch, in which he pointed out that the Wehrmacht would not be ready for war for years and lacked the resources to fight a sustained conflict. He had concluded that a military solution to the Czech problem was a bad idea. Brauchitsch and Keitel had considered Beck's political conclusions too explosive and had only submitted the military section of the memo to the Fuehrer, but Hitler angrily rejected it as unduly pessimistic. Upon hearing Hitler's decision to ''wipe Czechoslovakia off the map,'' even if it meant a war with the West, Beck reacted in a manner that was typical of the man: he wrote another memorandum. This one was dated May 29. Hitler was right in demanding Lebensraum, Beck wrote, both in Europe and in colonial areas. In Europe, however, new territory could only be acquired by war. Hitler was also correct in stating that the existence of

Czechoslovakia in its present form was intolerable to the Reich, the general continued, but a military solution demanded that the potential gain must justify the potential risk. He then came to the point: Hitler was wrong when he said that the Germany of 1938 was stronger than that of 1914. Compared with the Imperial Army of 1914, the Wehrmacht was inferior in ''personnel, equipment and morale.'' In terms of finance, food, and raw materials, Germany's position in 1938 was even worse than it had been in 1917–18 (that is, just before the collapse) and the German people would oppose any war that was not clearly unavoidable. He then discussed the hinterlands and colonial and dominion resources of the United Kingdom, France, and the United States, and concluded that, while Germany might conquer Czechoslovakia and win a few blitzkrieg victories, her position in a second world war would, in the long run, be hopeless.[6]

Beck took his memo to Brauchitsch on May 30 and read it aloud, to make sure the weak-willed commander-in-chief understood it. That same day, Hitler sent a written directive to the commanders-in-chief of the three services, notifying them of his decision to destroy Czechoslovakia and ordering them to be ready to carry out the operation by the end of September. General Beck immediately went to work drafting yet another memorandum, complaining that Hitler's directive had been drafted without consulting the General Staff of the Army and was ''militarily unsound.'' The General Staff therefore refused to assume any responsibility for any measures taken in connection with it.[7]

General von Brauchitsch did not contradict any of Beck's statements or conclusions, but he did not support them, either; rather, he merely sat on Beck's memoranda and would not forward them to Hitler. The chief of the General Staff, however, refused to be stonewalled. Instead of conducting the annual General Staff tour in 1938, he held a major indoor war game, to study the course of a conflict involving a German attack against Czechoslovakia, followed by French intervention. The war game was obviously designed to demonstrate to the entire top-level military command the dangers inherit in Hitler's proposed invasion. The exercise resulted in Germany crushing Czechoslovakia, but not before the French Army had advanced so far into the Reich that defeat could not be avoided. In his capacity as chief of the General Staff, Beck closed the war game by concluding that the political leadership (that is, Hitler) must be guided by the country's economic and military capabilities; otherwise, the results would be disastrous.

Generally speaking, Beck's warnings were well received. During the dinner at the Hotel Esplanade, held at the end of the games, only Major Rudolf Schmundt (who had replaced Hossbach as Hitler's Wehrmacht adjutant) and Colonel Hans Jeschonnek, the chief of operations of the Luftwaffe, spoke against the chief. They suggested that Beck's

conclusions were flawed because he had failed to keep abreast of the technical advances in his field, and there was some truth to their comments: the war game had indicated that Beck's ideas for employing panzer units were wrong at the operational level. The majority of the officers, however, agreed with Beck on the larger issue of whether or not the war could be won. The result was another memorandum to Brauchitsch, this one dated July 16, in which Beck painted Germany's prospects in the blackest possible terms. He concluded by urging the commander-in-chief of the army to arrange a meeting between Hitler and his commanders, during which the generals (as previously arranged) would firmly and unanimously oppose the war. If Hitler still refused to see sense, Beck wrote, it was the duty of the senior commanders of the Wehrmacht to force him to halt his preparations for war by collectively resigning their posts. Hitler would consider the commander-in-chief of OKH and the chief of the General Staff both expendable and replaceable; however, he could not fire all of his senior commanders. ''History will indict these commanders of blood guilt if, in light of their professional and political knowledge, they do not obey the dictates of their conscience,'' Beck wrote.[8] ''Military obedience has a limit where knowledge, conscience and a sense of responsibility forbid the execution of a command. If their warnings receive no hearing then soldiers have the right and duty to resign.... If they all act with resolution a policy of war is impossible.''[9]

Beck addressed an issue that the generals had not yet been compelled to face: Did an officer have a higher allegiance than the one he owed the Fuehrer by his oath? Beck concluded that the Officers' Corps owed a higher allegiance to the German people and now must act on that fact. ''Exceptional times demand exceptional measures,'' he added.

Ludwig Beck was not the only officer to go on record as opposing a war over Czechoslovakia. Vice Admiral Guenther Guse, the chief of the Naval Staff, issued a similar call on July 17, and Captain Helmut Heye, his senior operations officer, went so far as to urge the reestablishment of the rule of law in Germany, including halting the persecution of the churches and the Jews. It was Beck, however, who really counted, for he occupied the most prestigious post in the armed forces, and he was in the process of making the mental and moral transition from an officer in opposition to the Fuehrer's orders to an officer in opposition to the Fuehrer himself. Speaking to the American military attaché that summer, he said prophetically: ''Hitler will be Germany's undoing. He far overestimates our military power. Sooner or later there will be a catastrophe.''[10]

Meanwhile, preparations for war continued at an accelerated pace. Hitler entrusted the West Wall defensive belt opposite the French frontier to Dr. Fritz Todt, the builder of the autobahns, and soon dozens of

RAD (labor) battalions and tens of thousands of men were laboring on the task. Elsewhere, the newly created 4th Panzer Division was activated at Wuerzburg, the 4th Panzer Brigade was formed at Stuttgart, the 5th Panzer Brigade was organized at Bamberg, the 6th Panzer Brigade was sworn in at Paderborn, and the 8th Panzer Brigade was mustered in at Sagan.[11] Elsewhere, Luftwaffe Groups 1, 2, and 3—the future air fleets that would devastate much of Europe—were established. Unlike the old Luftkreise (which were absorbed by the group commands or were abolished), the new Luftwaffe Group commands were not military district headquarters. They were not designed to administer territories or installations, or to draft new recruits: they were air force command headquarters, controlling fighter squadrons, bomber wings, and Stuka formations, and were created with a combat mission in mind. Meanwhile, the old *Luftkreise* were replaced by *Luftgaukommandos* (air district commands, hereafter cited as *Luftgaue*). These Luftgaue were corps-level air districts set up parallel to the Wehrkreise, and they provided draftees and replacements for the air force almost until the end of the war.

The implications of this reorganization must have been obvious to the British, the Czechs, and every other informed observer. The Luftwaffe had gone a long way toward separating its operational functions from its territorial and administrative missions—implying a motive that had ominous implications for the entire world.

CRISIS IN THE ARMY HIGH COMMAND

During the second half of July, the international situation again became uneasy. The government-SDP negotiations were clearly at the point of failing, and, in early August, Francois-Poncet, the French ambassador to Berlin, reported to Paris that the Third Reich was obviously preparing for war.[12] He was certainly right in his opinion, but not if Ludwig Beck could prevent it. He met with General von Brauchitsch on July 29 and pressured him into calling the army group and corps commanders to a conference at Berlin on August 4. Not trusting Brauchitsch to show moral courage, Beck had written a speech for him, in which he clearly described Germany's isolated position and stated that Germany would not be ready for war until 1941 at the earliest. Hitler, the address concluded, must act in accordance with these facts.

Brauchitsch would not deliver the ghostwritten speech, but he did allow Beck to read aloud his memo of July 16. He then invited General Wilhelm Adam, who was in charge of the western defenses and commander-in-chief-designate of the Western Front, to discuss the situation in his zone. Adam spoke in support of Beck's views and soberly

described the West Wall defenses as incomplete, only partially manned, and totally inadequate to halt the French Army. He pointed out that Case Green, the plan for the invasion of Czechoslovakia, left him with only five active-duty divisions, along with four reserve divisions and 14 divisions of overage (*Landwehr*) troops (ages 35 to 45). He predicted that these forces would be quickly overrun by the French, who could field about 100 divisions. After the general concluded his remarks, Brauchitsch confessed that he shared the concerns of Beck and Adam, and even added that a general European war would mean the end of German culture. Beck then invited the other generals to put forth any differing views, and none did. Here, however, the conference began to unravel, at least from General Beck's point of view. He wanted Brauchitsch to lead the generals en masse to the Fuehrer and demand that he change his policy. Brauchitsch, however, could not bring himself to lead even a peaceful military revolt or to take any other steps that might cost him his position. Gerd von Rundstedt advised him to proceed cautiously, possibly because he was afraid that Hitler might otherwise sack von Brauchitsch and replace him with Reichenau, whom Rundstedt detested. Only Reichenau and Ernst Busch, the commander of the VIII Corps, expressed the view that all they had to do was trust the Fuehrer; he would do the right thing. Busch also spoke about their oath of loyalty and of their duty to obey without question. Only Adam and Guenther von Kluge felt that the generals should resort to mass resignations if Hitler refused to adopt their views on this issue. Most of the generals said nothing at all.

Brauchitsch knew that the Fuehrer would now be informed about Beck's memorandum of July 16, so he showed it to him. Hitler found his suspicions of Beck confirmed; he encouraged Brauchitsch to avoid General Beck in the future and to deal directly with General Franz Halder, the deputy chief of the General Staff and head of the operations branch. Brauchitsch half-heartedly expressed the generals' reservations about Operation Green, but when Hitler firmly stood his ground, the commander-in-chief quickly backed down. Privately, Hitler said that he would take Czechoslovakia with one group of generals and would then face France with a new set. Possibly with this thought in mind, Hitler held a luncheon for junior officers at the Berghof on August 10. The guests included all of the officers earmarked to be chiefs of staff for armies and Luftwaffe group commands in the upcoming campaign. Beck and Brauchitsch were not invited. Fritsch would not have tolerated such a flagrant violation of protocol, but Brauchitsch never uttered the slightest protest.

After lunch, the Fuehrer spoke for three hours. When he told the officers that the French could not penetrate the West Wall, he was interrupted and contradicted by General of Infantry Gustav von

Wietersheim, the senior man present. Wietersheim repeated Adam's assessment of the situation and predicted that the French could not be held up on the Western Front for three weeks. When he heard this, Hitler flew into a rage and called the generals defeatists and scoundrels. Finally, he regained a measure of control over himself and assured Wietersheim that the fortifications could be held for three years. The officers were shocked and intimidated by this display of temper on the part of the head of state, and no one else dared to protest against Hitler's invasion plans. According to General von Manstein, this was the last meeting at which Hitler permitted any questions or discussions from his military officers.[13]

If Hitler's purpose in holding the Berghof luncheon had been to convert the junior generals to his way of thinking or to convince them that Operation Green was feasible, he failed miserably. If his purpose was to send a message to his senior commanders that he would not tolerate opposition to his plans and to suggest that he could do without them, he succeeded very well. Five days later, on August 15, Hitler addressed the senior commanders in the officers' mess at Jueterbog. He was in top form and told his audience that it was time to acquire Lebensraum. He had already obtained the basis for action: national unity, the renunciation of Versailles, rearmament, the Rhineland, and Anschluss. Next would come Czechoslovakia. He assured the generals that the other powers would not intervene, and many of them, against their own better judgment, were swept along by his record of success and his oratory and began to doubt their own convictions. At the end of the speech, no one raised any objections, nor did Hitler show any indication that he was willing to discuss the matter. After this address, Beck asked to speak to Brauchitsch privately, but the commander-in-chief of the army refused to see him.

After the Berghof luncheon and the Jueterbog speech, Ludwig Beck concluded that his efforts to prevent war had come to nothing. He finally got to meet with Brauchitsch on August 18, and submitted his resignation. Harsh words were exchanged between them in this, their last meeting. Brauchitsch was tired of the pressure the chief of the General Staff had put on him to make him do what he knew was right, and Beck was sick of Brauchitsch's spinelessness. General Beck called on the commander-in-chief to submit his resignation as well, but Brauchitsch refused, on the grounds that it was his duty to obey orders. ''Brauchitsch left me in the lurch,'' Beck complained later. Hitler accepted Beck's resignation on August 21, but insisted that it remain secret for the time being. Beck complied with this request. He was replaced by Franz Halder, the first Catholic and the first Bavarian chief of the General Staff, who assumed his duties on Saturday, August 27.

THE ANTI-HITLER CONSPIRACY FORMS

Meanwhile, for the first time, a major conspiracy was forming against Adolf Hitler. The civilian conspirators included Carl Goerdeler, the mayor of Leipzig from 1930 to 1937, and a former mayor of Koenigsberg (1920–30). A conservative monarchist at heart, Goerdeler was convinced that only an authoritarian state was the right kind of government for Germany. Although he was highly intelligent and devoutly religious, he was distrusted by several of the conspirators because he lacked discretion and had an unfortunate habit of writing a detailed memo about any and all subjects, including those that could have gotten himself and others hanged for high treason—a possibility that became a reality several years later.

Other important civilian conspirators included some of the best minds in Nazi Germany, both inside and outside the government. Hjalmar Schacht, for example, was a member, as was Johannes Popitz, the Prussian minister of finance and a holder of the Golden Party Badge. The principle foreign affairs adviser to the conspirators was Ulrich von Hassell, the former ambassador to Italy and a gentleman of the old school, who looked down on the Nazis as vulgar and common trash. Count Helmuth von Moltke, the great-grandnephew of the field marshal who took Paris in 1871, was an intellectual and pacifist who later formed the Kreisau Circle, a resistance group of young idealists. Another intellectual member of the conspiracy who was admired on an international scale was Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Protestant clergyman and member of the Confessional Church, who considered Hitler the anti-Christ and believed it was the duty of Christians to dispose of him, even if it meant assassination. Another major member of the anti-Hitler conspiracy was Dr. Hans Bernd Gisevius, a former member of the Gestapo, a member of the Abwehr, and a leader in the shadowy anti-Hitler movement. Other civilian conspirators included Julius Leber, a trade union leader and a former Social Democrat leader in the Reichstag, and Count Berthold von Stauffenberg, a legal official in the foreign ministry. The ranks of these conspirators would grow in the months and years ahead. The most important members of the conspiracy were soldiers, however, because only the army possessed the physical strength to overthrow Hitler and his regime, and, within the army, only certain, key officers were in a position to do the job.

In terms of potential, the most important military conspirator in 1938 was General of Artillery Franz Halder, who replaced Beck as chief of the General Staff. He was an upright, conservative, correct, and unimaginative staff officer with a great capacity for hard work. Telford Taylor described him as ''Professionally gifted, vain, and querulous, Halder was not devoid of decent motives. But his anti-Nazism was

continually at war with his own military ambitions.''[14] Initially he followed Beck's lead and was the *de facto* head of the movement to preserve the peace and rid the world of Hitler. Even before he took over as chief, he was in close contact with Admiral Canaris's Abwehr (military intelligence) branch, which was sort of a ''safe house'' for the conspiracy. Conspirators who doubled as Abwehr agents could go places—even to foreign countries—and conduct activities with immunity, when otherwise they would have been picked up by the Gestapo. The role of Admiral Canaris himself in the anti-Hitler resistance has been the subject of debate for years, but it now seems likely that Canaris joined the movement as a sort of insurance policy, in case the Wehrmacht was successful in deposing the Fuehrer. His deputy, Colonel Hans Oster, was much more fervently committed to the cause. Halder already knew Oster well: he had been one of Halder's staff officers when he had been chief of staff of Wehrkreis VI in the old Reichswehr.

Oster, the son of a Protestant clergyman, had joined the army as a Fahnenjunker in the artillery in 1907. He had not had a particularly distinguished career. He had only reached the rank of major by March 1933, when, after 25 years service, he was forced out of the army because of a scandal: Oster, who was a married man, was caught having an affair with the wife of a fellow officer. He was not allowed to return to active duty until after Hitler began his secret military expansion and only then as a territorial (E) officer. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel (E) in late 1935.[15]

Hans Oster was a conservative who had a fierce hatred for the regime and was determined to do anything he could to force its demise. As chief of staff of the Abwehr, he was in a position to serve as a liaison officer between the various factions of the conspiracy. For example, Hitler had strictly forbidden the OKH and foreign ministry to communicate with each other in any form; however, as had been the case under Beck, Oster kept Halder in contact with the Ernst von Weizsaecker and the foreign office via the Abwehr. Halder was therefore able to monitor the development of the Sudeten Crisis and to judge how serious the situation really was, and he was frightened by what he learned. At the end of August, he asked Oster what technical and political preparations had been made for a coup. As it turned out, very little concrete planning had been done. Oster was, however, able to answer that certain important people, including Schacht and Goerdeler, had agreed to participate at the political level.

Halder did not know Goerdeler except by his reputation, and he therefore had no desire to meet with him. He preferred instead to work with Schacht, the highly respected financial ''wizard,'' whom he knew slightly and who exhibited better political acumen. Sometime during the first week in September, on the recommendation of Ludwig Beck

(who still had considerable influence), Halder, accomplished by Gisevius, visited Schacht at his home. (As is the case with many of the conferences between the conspirators, it is not possible to pinpoint the exact date of this meeting. They did not keep records of their conferences for obvious reasons.) During this meeting, Halder exhibited a characteristic he would demonstrate for the next four years: a tendency to blow hot and cold—to act like a man willing to lead a revolt one minute, and to act like someone who wished to disassociate himself from the resistance movement the next. He was clearly taken aback when Schacht began to frankly discuss the possibility of deposing Hitler. Halder responded by doubting that the military should involve itself in the affair. ''The people who put Hitler into power should get rid of him,'' he said, pointedly. ''You elected Hitler, you put him in power. We soldiers had no right to vote.'' After some encouragement by Schacht and Gisevius, however, Halder was denouncing Hitler as a ''criminal'' and a ''madman.''[16] He asked Schacht if he was willing to play a leading role in a new government if an anti-Hitler putsch was successful. Even asking this question constituted high treason, which was punishable by the death penalty; Schacht nevertheless agreed to serve, although no detailed political program was discussed.

A few days later, Dr. Gisevius visited Halder at the general's apartment in Berlin-Zehlendorf, to discuss further details of the coup. This meeting was not a success, and Gisevius got the distinct impression that the general was an overly cautious man who could not be relied on. Halder, for example, did not want to use the army to assassinate Hitler; instead, he spoke in terms of detonating a bomb on Hitler's train. The Fuehrer's death could then be ascribed to an enemy bomber attack. When Schacht and Gisevius visited Halder's apartment a few days later, they found him drained of all resolve, now apparently hoping that, despite everything, Hitler would be able to annex the Sudetenland without war. Both men left with the impression that they could not rely on Franz Halder. Schacht later described him as a man of rubber—full of courage when someone pumped him up, but limp when the air was let out. Other military leaders, however, were much more consistent and reliable.

The commander of Wehrkreis III—the Berlin Military District—was General of Infantry Erwin von Witzleben, a simple, uncomplicated Prussian soldier. During the Roehm purge, Witzleben let it be known that he was ready and willing to use his troops against the SA if the Fuehrer needed them. When he heard of the executions going on at the Gross-Lichterfeld Cadet School, Witzleben laughed and said that he wished it were possible for him to watch. Then he learned that SS murder squads had gunned down Generals von Schleicher and von Bredow, and his attitude toward the Nazis instantly reversed. He

demanded a military inquiry into their deaths, as did General von Rundstedt, General Ritter von Leeb, and Witzleben's own chief of staff, Colonel von Manstein. Blomberg, however, blocked the investigation. After the Blood Purge, Witzleben disapproved of the Nazis and favored a restoration of the monarchy. It was only after his good friend, Baron von Fritsch, was dismissed from his post as commander-in-chief of the army on trumped up charges of homosexuality that Erwin von Witzleben became a fervent anti-Nazi who advocated the overthrow of the regime by military force. He was even willing to seize the War Ministry and arrest senior generals, if need be. He was the rock of the resistance, and it was around him that all plans were based.

Witzleben induced another highly placed officer into the conspiracy: Major General Count Walter von Brockdorff-Ahlefeldt, the commander of the 23rd Infantry Division, which was based at Potsdam, near Berlin. It had a conservative officer corps and could be counted on to obey the orders of Witzleben and Brockdorff in a crisis.

The conspirators had no detailed political agenda, nor could one have been realistically suggested, with so many diverse factions and the necessity to maintain secrecy. Basically, the conspirators planned to establish a military dictatorship, which was to last for the shortest possible period of time. Then a civilian government would be formed followed by parliamentary elections, based on the old Weimar Constitution. The details of the new government would have to be worked out later.

Detailed tactical planning, however, could not wait and was done by Witzleben, Brockdorff-Ahlefeldt, and Gisevius, who was given a conference room next to Witzleben's office. To prevent the Wehrkreis officers from becoming suspicious, they were told that Gisevius was a relative of the general and was engaged in arranging the family's papers.

Using his former Gestapo contacts, Gisevius worked out the location of all SS units in the Reich. It was critical that all SS and police forces be neutralized as rapidly as possible, and all major radio transmitters and telephone and telegraph exchanges must be seized by the conspirators before the Nazis had a chance to react. Simultaneously, the putschists had to capture the Reichschancellery, all major ministries, and the Post Office repeater stations, through which the police telephone and teleprinter circuits were routed. Meanwhile, the Wehrkreise commanders had to receive orders as to what offices to occupy and who to arrest; martial law had to be declared; appropriate regulations issued; and dozens of other details had to be addressed.

In the meantime, Franz Halder, who had been blowing hot and cold, was blowing hot again. He placed Lieutenant General Erich Hoepner's

1st Light Division under Witzleben's direct command. The division was ostensibly on its fall maneuvers from September 5 to 23; actually, it was secretly deploying in the Greiz-Plauen-Chemnitz sector, its jump-off points for the invasion of Czechoslovakia. From this position, however, it could also execute a mission of an entirely different nature—when the revolt began, it could block the road to Berlin to the SS, especially Sepp Dietrich's elite Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, which was deployed in the Grafenwoehr Maneuver Area, preparing for its role in the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

In addition, Witzleben acquired the use of the 50th Infantry Regiment, based at Landsberg on the Warthe. Its commander, Major General Paul von Hase, was easy to recruit into the conspiracy, since he had advocated using force to overthrow the regime during the Fritsch crisis. Halder, meanwhile, said that he was sure he could obtain support of several army and corps commanders as soon as the coup began, although he did not feel safe discussing it with them beforehand. What Witzleben thought about this idea is not known; in any case, his final plan for the military coup against Hitler did not depend on commanders who *might* join the resistance at the critical hour.

One group the conspirators would need to at least remain neutral during the decisive first hours of the coup was the Berlin police. Here they were lucky. The police vice president of Berlin since 1937 was the indomitable Count Fritz-Dietlof von der Schulenburg, who had joined the Nazi Party in 1933, but had soon become disgusted with their behavior. He finally made the mental break with the party during the Fritsch Crisis. Fortunately, he was able to win over the police president, Count Wolf Heinrich von Helldorf, a former cavalry officer and a high-ranking SA commander, who had considerable cause to hate the SS.[17]

Schulenburg (who is sometimes mistaken for his brother, Werner, the German ambassador to Moscow) made contact with Oster (and then Witzleben) through Albrecht von Kessel, the personal assistant to State Secretary Weizsaecker. Throughout its existence, the anti-Hitler resistance movement had to depend on such tenuous contacts and was indeed fortunate that it was able to secure the services of as many talented people as it did.

The Witzleben-Brockdorff-Gisevius plan was not specific concerning what to do with Adolf Hitler himself. He was to be apprehended in the Reichschancellery (and taken alive, if possible) by an assault group of about 30 reliable men, led by Major Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, a former Stahlhelm commander. General Beck was opposed to tyrannicide because he feared the start of a new ''stabbed in the back'' legend; besides, he felt Hitler should be exposed and forced to stand trial for his crimes. Oster and Judge Advocate Dr. Hans von Dohnanyi wanted Hitler arrested and declared mentally insane by a panel of doctors.

Dohnanyi had already earmarked his father-in-law, Professor Karl Bonhoeffer, a psychiatrist, as chairman of the panel. General Halder was not opposed to assassinating Hitler, as long as the part that he and the army played in the Fuehrer's demise did not become known. Canaris and Goerdeler, however, insisted that Hitler be taken alive, and Witzleben leaned in that direction as well.

Major Heinz, however, was a man with more than one secret. He had no intention of even trying to take Adolf Hitler alive. He considered the senior officers naive and unrealistic in wanting Hitler captured, so he ignored them and secretly ordered his men to kill Adolf Hitler, even if there was no resistance from his SS guards. In fact, Major Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz intended to personally dispatch Adolf Hitler with his own gun, if everything went according to plan.

Everything, however, did not go according to the script. Indeed, all of the conspirators' plans for overthrowing the Nazi regime were predicated on Adolf Hitler being in Berlin when the international situation neared the boiling point. And this was the fatal flaw in their plans. On more than one occasion during the Sudetenland Crisis, the international situation reached the point at which it seemed likely that war would break out at any moment, but the Nazi dictator seemed to be avoiding the capital like the plague. No doubt about it: Adolf Hitler had the survival instincts of a rat.

EUROPE AT THE BRINK OF WAR

By now, German military concentrations against Czechoslovakia were so far advanced that they could no longer be concealed or denied. Consequently, on September 2, France recalled recently discharged conscripts, called up several reserve and training units, and announced that the draftees slated for discharge at the end of September would not be released. In Europe at that time, a partial mobilization was considered a step only slightly less serious than a general mobilization, which was tantamount to a declaration of war. Indeed, during the first week of September, war fever broke out in Europe. Consumers hoarded food, air raid drills were held, new bomb shelters were hastily constructed, and urban dwellers sent their children to stay with friends and relatives in the country. In Moscow, important diplomatic talks took place concerning the possible intervention of the Red Army in central Europe. On September 5, however, Czech President Eduard Benes bowed to pressure from London and agreed to accept Henlein' s demands—whatever they might be. The world breathed a collective sigh of relief. Benes's concessions virtually amounted to capitulation; surely, it was thought, peace was now ensured.

This was a false sense of relief, because Hitler wanted war, not peace. He only wanted to fight Czechoslovakia, however, not to provoke a general European war. To accomplish this, he would have to convince London and Paris that Prague was at fault and was the cause of the problems in central Europe. Benes had done major damage to the credibility of this policy on September 5, but Hitler and his Sudetenland confederates nevertheless continued to pursue it. On September 7, the SDP—acting on instructions from the Fuehrer—seized upon a minor border incident as a pretext for breaking off negotiations with Prague. And the international situation continued to fester.

Meanwhile, the Nazi Party Rally began at Nuremberg. By September 8, it was clear to both the pro-Nazi Colonel Jodl and anti-Hitler conspirator Lieutenant General Heinrich von Stuelpnagel that the Fuehrer was being affected by the fanaticism whipped up by the rally. Stuelpnagel was openly pessimistic about the situation in the West, and even the usually optimistic Jodl was worried. Stuelpnagel, who had succeeded Halder as *Oberquartiermeister* I (chief of operations) at OKH, asked Jodl for five days' warning before the attack on Czechoslovakia began. Jodl replied that, because of the uncertainty of weather and other considerations, he could only guarantee two days' warning. This was enough for Stuelpnagel and his fellow conspirators—if only Hitler would return to Berlin.

THE WEHRMACHT DEPLOYS

By this time, the German Army had completed its pre-invasion operations. The detailed planning, which began in June, was essentially finished by early August. The calling up of reserves had begun in late August, and the regular divisions were brought up to their full combat strengths.

The German Army in the fall of 1938 had 47 regular divisions: 34 of them were infantry, four were motorized infantry, three were mountain divisions, and three were light divisions. Only three were panzer divisions. In addition, a fourth panzer and a fourth light were in the process of formation. Since most of the trained reservists were needed to bring the regular divisions up to strength, only eight new divisions could be formed from reserve components. In addition, 21 *Landwehr* divisions, made up of older age men, were available, but their usefulness was limited to holding static positions.

Meanwhile, the higher headquarters of the army were organized for active warfare, and almost every one of them changed its designation. For Operation Green, the divisions of the field army were divided among 10 army groups and an army group headquarters.

The single army group headquarters was Army Group 2, led by General Adam, which moved from Kassel to Frankfurt-am-Main in July. It controlled three armies: the 7th, located in the south, defended the east bank of the Rhine; the 1st, headquartered in Wiesbaden, defended the Rhineland between Karlsruhe and Trier; and the 5th, located in the north, screened Adam's right flank, opposite the Low Countries. Curt Liebmann, the former commander of the War Academy, commanded the 5th Army. The 7th Army was directed by General of Infantry Baron Hans Seutter von Loetzen, a former commander of Army Group 2 who had retired from active duty in 1933. He was an old friend of Adam.

Initially, OKH planned for Adam to command both the 1st Army and the army group, but the former chief of the General Staff objected to this arrangement, which would have been fundamentally unworkable in an active campaign. As a result, command of the 1st Army was given to a surprising choice: General of Artillery Ludwig Beck, who was called out of retirement. (Incidentally, the German army headquarters was normally a much larger organization than the army group headquarters. The army headquarters was responsible for supply, security, and a wide range of administrative functions, and included many component units, including a higher artillery headquarters and artillery, engineer, and signals units. The army group headquarters, on the other hand, had only one major mission: to exercise command over its subordinate armies.)

Adam's forces (three full armies) were impressive—on paper. An ''army,'' however, is a headquarters unit, not a combat formation, and is no stronger than the forces assigned to it. For General Adam in 1938, this amounted to only five active duty divisions (all non-motorized infantry) and four reserve infantry divisions. The rest of his 14 divisions were all Landwehr. He did not have a single panzer or motorized unit in his entire command.

The other seven armies were directly subordinate to General von Brauchitsch and OKH. Two were given purely defensive missions: Georg von Kuechler's 3rd Army (the upgraded I Corps) in East Prussia, with three active duty infantry divisions and the 1st Cavalry Brigade; and the 4th Army, which controlled the western side of the Polish Corridor in West Prussia and Pomerania. Kuechler was charged with defending East Prussia and the 4th Army was given the mission of defending Berlin, in the unlikely event that Poland switched sides and attacked Germany. All of its units were reserve or Landwehr. Surprisingly, Kurt von Hammerstein was called out of retirement and given command of the 4th Army.

The remaining five armies had the main combat mission of smashing Czechoslovakia and deployed in an arc around Bohemia and Moravia. From left to right (beginning on the German-Polish border), they were the 2nd Army in Upper Silesia, which was posed to strike southward,

across the narrow waist of Czechoslovakia; the 8th Army, concentrated in the area south of Dresden, north of Prague; the 10th Army, opposite the western frontier of Bohemia, northeast of Nuremberg; the 12th Army, headquartered at Passau, assembled in southeastern Bavaria and in former Austrian territory, north of Linz; and the 14th Army, deployed north of Vienna, was preparing to attack northward into Moravia, where it could link up with the 2nd Army, forming a giant pincer.

All of the five strike armies except the 12th were constituted from the old army group headquarters. Rundstedt led the 2nd Army, which was the former Army Group 1 from Berlin. Bock's Army Group 3 at Dresden became the 8th Army; Reichenau's Army Group 4 at Leipzig became the 10th Army; and List's Army Group 5 at Vienna was redesignated as the 14th Army. Only Headquarters, 12th Army, was constructed from scratch. It was commanded by General Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb, who was also called out of retirement. As yet, Germany had no armies using the numbers 6, 9, 11, or 13. In total, the German Army had 700,000 troops available for offensive operations against Czechoslovakia.

The Czechs had a peacetime army of a quarter of a million men, which was expandable to 600,000 men upon mobilization. The French Regular Army had some 600,000 men, but 240,000 of these were recruits with less than one year's service, and the rest were not tactically organized for anything except a defensive action, to cover a general mobilization.[18] Table 10.1 shows the German Army's Order of Battle. The German Air Force generally deployed in support of the army. Table 10.2 shows the Order of Battle of the Luftwaffe in September 1938.

THE PLAN AND CRISIS

Brauchitsch and Halder completed the final plan for the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August. It called for a converging attack, delivered from the north by Rundstedt's 2nd Army, while List's 14th and Leeb's 12th delivered the main attack from the south. They would link up between Olmuetz and Brno (Bruenn), cutting off Slovakia from the rest of the republic and encircling the main Czech army in Bohemia and western Moravia. Major General Kurt Student's parachute division was to be dropped in the vicinity of Freudenthal, 15 miles inside Moravia, to help speed up the advance of the 3rd Panzer Division, which was to spearhead the 2nd Army's advance on Olmuetz.

It was a good plan, but Adolf Hitler thought it depended too much on the pincer movement in Moravia. He felt more emphasis should be placed on a frontal assault—that is, a drive directly on Prague by the 10th Army. The pincer movement, he felt, should be executed as well, but not relied on exclusively. He did not press his objections until after the Nuremberg Rally had begun, however; then, pumped up by the

Table 10.1
Order of Battle of the German Army, September 1938

Deployed Against Czechoslovakia:
OKH: Colonel General Walter von Brauchitsch
2nd Army: Colonel General Gerd von Rundstedt
  II Corps: General of Infantry Johannes Blaskowitz
  VIII Corps: General of Infantry Ernst Busch
  X Corps: General of Cavalry Wilhelm Knochenhauer
8th Army: Colonel General Fedor von Bock
  IV Corps: General of Infantry Viktor von Schwedler
  XI Corps: General of Artillery Wilhelm Ulex
10th Army: General of Artillery Walter von Reichenau
  VI Corps: General of Artillery Guenther von Kluge
  XIII Corps: General of Cavalry Baron Maximilian von Weichs
  XVI Corps: Lieutenant General Heinz Guderian
12th Army: General of Artillery Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb
  V Corps: General of Infantry Hermann Geyer
  VII Corps: General of Infantry Ritter Eugen von Schobert
  IX Corps: General of Artillery Friedrich Dollmann
14th Army: General of Artillery Wilhelm List
  XVII Corps: General of Infantry Werner Kienitz
  XVIII Corps: General of Infantry Eugen Beyer
Deployed in Prussia and Pomerania:
4th Army: General of Infantry Baron Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord
3rd Army: General of Artillery Georg von Kuechler
Deployed In the West:
Army Group 2: General of Mountain Troops Wilhelm Adam
  5th Army: General of Infantry Curt Liebmann
  1st Army: General of Artillery Ludwig Beck
    XII Corps: General of Infantry Walter Schroth
  7th Army: General of Infantry Baron Hans Seutter von Loetzen
In Reserve:
III Corps: General of Infantry Erwin von Witzleben (in Berlin)
STRENGTHS UPON DEPLOYMENT (regular divisions only):
2nd Army: 10 divisions: 8 infantry, 1 panzer, 1 light.
8th Army: 4 infantry divisions.
10th Army: 8 divisions: 3 infantry, 3 motorized, 1 panzer, 1 light.
12th Army: 8 divisions: 7 infantry, 1 mountain
14th Army: 6 divisions: 1 infantry, 1 motorized, 1 panzer, 1 light, 2 mountain.
TOTAL DEPLOYED AGAINST CZECHOSLOVAKIA: 36 divisions: 23 infantry, 4 motorized, 3 panzer, 3 light, 3 mountain.
TOTAL DEPLOYED IN ALL OTHER SECTORS: 9 divisions (all infantry) and 1 cavalry brigade (including units held in reserve).

Note:
XIV and XV Corps were apparently to be deactivated for the invasion. General of Infantry Gustav von Wietersheim (commander of the XIV Corps) was named chief of staff of Army Group 2, and Lieutenant General Hermann Hoth, the commander of the XV Corps, assumed command of the 18th Infantry Division, whose commander, Lieutenant General Erich von Manstein, became chief of staff of the newly activated 12th Army.

Table 10.2
Order of Battle of the Luftwaffe, September 1938

OKL: Field Marshal Hermann Goering
Chief of Staff: General Hans Jeschonnek
Deployed Against Czechoslovakia:
Luftwaffe Group 1: General Albert Kesselring
1st Air Division: General Ulrich Grauert
2nd Air Division: General Wilhelm Wimmer
7th Air Division: General Kurt Student
Luftwaffe Group 3: General Hugo Sperrle
5th Air Division: General Ludwig Wolff
Air Command Austria: General Alexander Loehr
Deployed in the West:
Luftwaffe Group 2: General Helmuth Felmy
3rd Air Division: General Richard Putzier
4th Air Division: General Hellmuth Bieneck
Deployed in the East:
Air Command East Prussia

fanatical enthusiasm of his followers, he summoned Brauchitsch and Halder to Nuremberg to discuss it with them.

The meeting between Hitler and his generals began at 10 P.M. on September 9, and it was stormy. Hitler, in effect, wanted to adopt *two* plans: a frontal assault from the west and a pincer attack from the south and north. Specifically, he wanted Reichenau's 10th Army reinforced with the 2nd Motorized and 13th Motorized Divisions (from Rundstedt's 2nd Army and Leeb's 12th Army, respectively). This move would give Reichenau a highly mobile and powerful force: one panzer, one light, and three motorized divisions. Within the 10th Army, Guderian's XVI Corps was to be the main assault force, controlling the 1st Panzer, 13th Motorized, and 20th Motorized Divisions. He could push, while Rundstedt, List, and Leeb pinched, Hitler suggested.

Halder, whose schoolmaster appearance belied his toughness, objected on the grounds that the frontal assault would weaken the pincers and might cause the main attack to fail, thus jeopardizing the success of the entire invasion. Brauchitsch let Halder do most of the talking, although he did half-heartedly suggest that the invasion be postponed until the dangers of a two-front war could be avoided. When the commander-in-chief made this remark, Hitler viciously accused him of lacking nerve. Keitel also dressed down the unhappy commander, telling him that he would not tolerate ''criticism'' and ''defeatism'' from the OKH. He accused the army generals of being jealous of the Fuehrer's

genius.[19] Brauchitsch was cowed, but Halder still would not give in. Finally, at 4 A.M. on September 10, Hitler grew tired of arguing and simply ordered that his plan be adopted. Then, to everyone's amazement, Brauchitsch declared his unquestioning loyalty to the Fuehrer. After the OKH generals had departed, Hitler turned to Keitel and bemoaned the fact that his Gauleiters could not command his armies, because they had both ''guts'' and faith in the Fuehrer.[20] Jodl noted in his diary:

> [I]t is highly unfortunate that the Fuehrer has the whole nation behind him with the exception of the leading generals of the Army.... They can no longer believe and no longer obey because they do not recognize the Fuehrer's genius. Many of them still see him as the corporal of the World War and not the greatest statesman since Bismarck.[21]

The international situation continued to worsen on September 10, as Hermann Goering delivered a hate-filled speech at the Nuremberg Rally and further increased the tension, which was becoming unbearable. International opinion was now finally turning against the Nazis and the Sudeten Germans, who were obviously not negotiating in good faith. In Prague, the Wilson Railway Station and the airport were full of Jews fleeing the country. Meanwhile, the government distributed gas masks to the population, and, in Britain, the fleet mobilized.

British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain tried desperately to head off a war via personal negotiations with Adolf Hitler. He met with the Fuehrer at Berchtesgaden on September 15 and then returned to London, where he quickly rallied the French and most of his cabinet to his policy of appeasement. He obtained devastating territorial concessions from the Czechs, but, when he met with the Fuehrer again at Bad Godesberg on September 22 and 23, Hitler again upped the ante and submitted entirely new demands. Once again Europe was pushed to the edge of war. Still, however, the putschists could do nothing; Hitler seemed to be avoiding Berlin like the Black Death.

Chamberlain returned to London on the morning of September 24 and immediately began a round of gloomy deliberations with his cabinet. He tried to persuade his colleagues to accept the new Nazi demands, but with little success. Duff Cooper, the First Lord of the Admiralty, firmly opposed the prime minister, who could carry neither his cabinet nor the French. Paris ordered a partial mobilization that same day.

BLACK WEDNESDAY

September 28, 1938, was called Black Wednesday. War seemed inevitable. In London, King George VI signed four proclamations calling up the Royal Navy's reserves, while the evacuation of school children

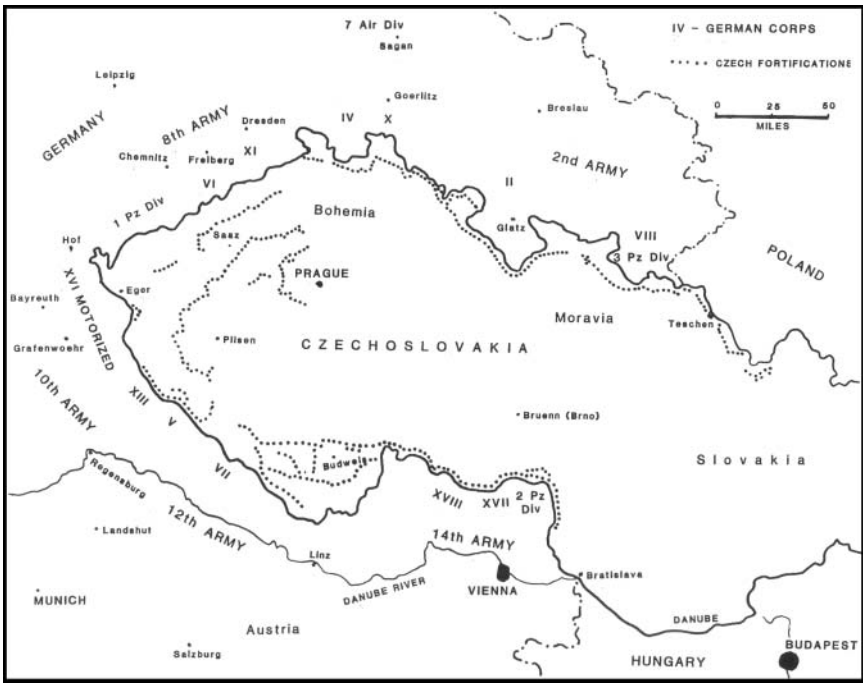
and hospitals continued. The Polish Army prepared to cross into Czechoslovakia to seize Teschen, while the Hungarian government ordered a partial mobilization and concentrated its army along the Czechoslovak frontier. To the East, the Red Army was preparing to intervene. Belgium called up six classes of reservists, while France, which had already mobilized several classes, called yet another class to the colors, bringing the strength of the French armed forces to more than 1.2 million men. Train stations in Paris were clogged with people who, fearing a devastating aerial bombardment from the Luftwaffe, were fleeing to the interior. The scene was similar in western Germany, where the roads were jammed. Along the borders of Bohemia and Moravia, German troops deployed near their jump-off points, while Czech reservists took up their positions inside their fortifications. French reservists manned the Maginot Line, the Royal Navy was ordered to mobilize, gas masks were passed out to the civilian population of London, and slit trenches were dug in Hyde Park. The tension was unbearable; it seemed as if World War II would break out at any moment. The ultimatum Hitler had issued at Bad Godesberg was due to expire at 2 P.M. Figure 10.1 shows the German deployment against Czechoslovakia.

Meanwhile, General Halder tried to pressure the commander-in-chief of the army into joining the putschists. He told von Brauchitsch that he planned to issue the order to revolt the next day, *if* Brauchitsch would agree. The general, however, vacillated. He was torn between the reasoning of Beck and Halder and the prospect of a losing war on the one hand, and his wife's influence and his personal debts to Hitler on the other. Divorced that summer, Brauchitsch had married his former mistress in Bad Salzbrunn, Silesia, just four days before.[22] She was described by von Hassell as 200 percent Nazi and had considerable influence on her weaker-willed husband.[23]

That morning, Chamberlain formally proposed a settlement of the Sudetenland issue by an international conference and treaty. Meanwhile, the Earl of Perth met with Mussolini in an effort to get him to intercede with his fellow dictator. This was a shrewd move, for Hitler owed the Duce a debt of gratitude after the Anschluss, and he kept the faith with Mussolini as with almost no other human being. Also, the Italian dictator relished the thought of becoming recognized as an international peacekeeper. Around 11:30 A.M., Mussolini telephoned Bernardo Attolico, his ambassador to Berlin, and instructed him to go to Hitler and ask that no military action be taken for another 24 hours, so that they might consult further on Chamberlain's proposal. After a slight hesitation, Hitler agreed—only two hours before his ultimatum was due to expire.

It is almost certain that this last-minute appeal from Mussolini was the only thing that deflected Hitler from war. It is possible, of course,

Figure 10.1
The Deployment Against Czechoslovakia



that Hitler would have shrunk from taking the decisive step at the last moment, but this seems unlikely. In a similar situation the following year, he kept on his course, and war was the result. In any case, that afternoon, Hitler decided to play host to a four-party conference, to begin at Munich the following day. He sent the British their invitation to the summit shortly after 3 P.M. The Czechs were deliberately excluded from the conference.

THE MUNICH ACCORDS AND THE TRIUMPH OF APPEASEMENT

The Munich conference was held on September 29 in the Fuehrerhaus, which was part of the Koenigsplatz, located just east of the Brown House, the former Barlow Palace and the Nazi Party Headquarters. (Today the Fuehrerhaus is the home of the Amerikahaus and the Bavarian State Archives.) The conference gave in to Hitler on every

major demand. One major stumbling block was the issue of Polish and Hungarian claims. Britain and France wanted an international guarantee of the new Czechoslovak boundaries, to protect it from aggression, now that they had traded off its fortifications. Hitler and Mussolini refused to issue such a guarantee until Warsaw and Budapest were satisfied. Finally a compromise was reached: France and the United Kingdom guaranteed the new borders, while Germany and Italy promised to do the same, once the question of the Polish and Hungarian minorities had been settled.

A few minutes after midnight on September 30, the Munich Accords were signed by the four major leaders of Europe. Only Mussolini seemed to be highly satisfied. The British tried to put up a good front, French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier was unhappy and did not bother to hide it, and Hitler sulked, because peace had never been his aim. The agreement stated that the Czechs must begin their evacuation of the Sudetenland on October 1 and complete it by October 10, with no destruction of installations. An international commission would determine the territories in which a plebiscite would be held and would administer these areas until it was completed. All voting would be held by the end of November. In addition, the Czech government was required to release all political prisoners at once.

On the afternoon of October 1, Neville Chamberlain was welcomed home as a hero. He spoke of ''peace with honor'' and said, ''I believe it is peace for our time.'' Alfred Duff Cooper, however, denounced the Munich Accords as a national disaster of the first magnitude and resigned as First Lord of the Admiralty.[24] The accords were debated in the House of Commons on October 3, which approved them by a vote of 366 to 144, but only after a heated debate. Thirty-five members of Chamberlain's own Conservative Party abstained, including Winston Churchill, Cooper, and Eden.

The French Chamber of Deputies voted to approve the agreement the following day, by a vote of 535 to 75. Daladier is said to have whispered that ''the fools did not know what they were cheering.''[25]

THE DISMEMBERMENT OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The occupation of the Sudetenland began on October 1 and continued by zone (of which there were four) until October 7. Leeb occupied Zone I (southern Bohemia) on October 1 and 2; Bock moved into Zone II (the northern extremity of Bohemia) on October 2 and 3. Reichenau occupied the largest area, Zone III (western Bohemia) on October 3–5; and Rundstedt occupied Zone IV (the northern strip of Moravia) on October 6 and 7.

From October 7–10, the International Commission specified other territories to be occupied, and all four armies moved forward again, as did List's army, which occupied a strip of southern Moravia. All of the Czech fortifications were in the annexed zones.

Now that the Czechs had abandoned their fortifications and were strategically helpless, Hitler toyed with the idea of immediately overrunning the rest of Czechoslovakia. He already had 24 divisions in the Sudetenland in the middle of October, so he had Keitel ask the army commanders what reinforcements they needed to seize the rest of the country. Keitel reported that, in view of the signs of weakness and demoralization in the Czech forces, the operation could begin without reinforcements. In the end, however, Hitler decided not to occupy the rest of the country—for the time being.

None of the provisions inserted into the Munich Accords to protect the Czechs were fulfilled. The clause for the departure from the ethnographic standard was applied only in the favor of Germany. By the time of the final settlement, which was reached on November 20, the Third Reich had expanded by 11,000 square miles. Hitler had succeeded in incorporating all 2.8 million Sudeten Germans into the Reich, as well as 800,000 Czechs. Czechoslovakia had lost much of its industrial capacity, most of its armaments industry, and much of its base of raw materials. Its entire system of rail, road, telephone, telegraph, and communications was disrupted or continued to function only by the fragile indulgence of Adolf Hitler. It had, in effect, become a defenseless state.

The Polish territorial claims were settled by a Polish ultimatum in October, and the Hungarian territorial claims were settled by a Ribbentrop-Ciano Award, which naturally favored Budapest. Poland took 650 square miles of territory around Teschen, which had a population of 228,000, of which 133,000 were Czechs. The Ribbentrop-Ciano Award of November 2, 1938, gave Hungary 7,500 square miles. This territory was inhabited by 500,000 Hungarians and 272,000 Slovaks. On October 13, the International Commission voted to dispense with the plebiscites altogether. They had already decided every question—in favor of Germany.

Under pressure from Berlin, Eduard Benes resigned as president of Czechoslovakia on October 5. Later, when he realized that his life was in danger, he fled to England. He was temporarily replaced by General Jan Syrovy, and, on November 30, by Dr. Emil Hacha, the 66-year-old chief justice of the supreme administrative court, who was considered a weak man and possibly senile.[26]

Even after Munich, Colonel Oster wanted to go through with the anti-Hitler coup, but he was stopped by General Erwin von Witzleben. A group of major conspirators assembled at Oster's home, where the general firmly opposed any action against the dictator. ''You see, gentlemen,'' he explained

[F]or this poor, foolish nation he is again our hotly beloved Fuehrer, the unique, the Godsent, and we, we are a small group of reactionary and discontented officers and politicians, who have dared in the moment of the highest triumph of the greatest statesman of all times throw pebbles in his path. If we do something now, then history, and not only German history, will report on us that he deserted the greatest German in the moment when he was greatest and the whole world recognized his greatness.[27]

Witzleben was certainly right when he said that the time for the putsch was over. He could not have realized that no better time would ever occur. The moment had presented itself, and, left unseized, it passed, never to appear again. Only a few weeks later, Witzleben himself was transferred out of the capital. His departure as commander of Wehrkreis III meant that the conspirators had lost their strongest leader and the only senior general who could command large numbers of troops in Berlin. (Halder, as chief of the General Staff, did not actually command troop units.) General von Witzleben was simply irreplaceable.

Witzleben was also right when he spoke about Hitler's standing in his own country and in the world, which, for the moment, looked upon him as a great statesman and peacemaker. Alfons Heck, then a member of the Hitler Youth and later an American journalist, wrote: ''If Hitler had died in 1938 . . . I am sure he would have gone down in German history as one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest German statesman who ever lived.''[28]

Had Hitler died between the signing of the Munich Accords and November 8, 1938 (Crystal Night—the night of unprovoked violence against the Jews), Heck's comment would have been absolutely correct, especially if one excludes Bismarck. This is all academic, of course, because Hitler did not die; he was, however, still very unhappy. He did not want to be a hero of peace: he had wanted war and *Lebensraum* and soon convinced himself (with the help of Ribbentrop and Himmler) that he had been deceived at Munich by the perfidious Albion, who had sacrificed the Sudetenland to give herself more time to arm.

He was also convinced that it was safe for him to continue his policy of Lebensraum in the East. After Munich, he believed that he could engage in a localized war, against the rump state of Czechoslovakia or perhaps against Poland, without interference from the West.

NOTES

1. Telford Taylor, *Munich* (1979; reprint ed., 1980), p. 380 (hereafter cited as Taylor, *Munich*).

2. Beck, at that time, did not believe Germany would be ready for war until 1939–40. By 1938, he had pushed this date back to 1941.

3. Ernst von Weizsaecker, *Memoirs*, John Andrews, trans. (1951; reprint ed., 1951), pp. 135–36.

4. Schmidt, *Interpreter*, p. 85.

5. *NCA*, vol. 5, pp. 743–44 (ND 3037-PS).

6. Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance, 1933–1945*, Richard Barry, trans. (1977), pp. 71–73 (hereafter cited as Hoffmann, *Resistance*).

7. Shirer, p. 367; Hoffmann, *Resistance*, p. 73.

8. Hoffmann, *Resistance*, pp. 74–75.

9. Juergen E. Foerster, ''The Dynamics of Volkegemeinschaft: The Effectiveness of the German Military Establishment in the Second World War,'' in *Military Effectiveness*, Millett and Murray, eds., vol. 3, *The Second World War*, p. 193 (hereafter cited as Foerster, ''Volkegemeinschaft'').

10. Allen W. Dulles and Peter Hoffmann, *Germany's Underground* (1947), pp. 39–40.

11. Georg Tessin, *Formationsgeschichte der Wehrmacht, 1933–1939: Stabe und Truppen* (1959), pp. 25–26. The 5th Panzer Brigade was assigned to the 4th Panzer Division, and the 8th Panzer Brigade later became part of the 5th Panzer Division. The 4th and 6th Panzer Brigades were nondivisional units and were controlled by Wehrkreise V and VI, respectively. There was no 7th Panzer Brigade.

12. Henri Nogueres, *Munich*, Patrick O'Brian, trans. (1965), p. 83 (hereafter cited as Nogueres).

13. IMT, vol. 20, p. 606.

14. Telford Taylor, *March of Conquest* (1958), p. 15 (hereafter cited as Taylor, *March*).

15. Keilig, p. 248, and Koch, *Aspects*, p. 381. Oster (who was born in Dresden in 1897) also had a problem with alcohol and had difficulty keeping his mouth shut. Although he was promoted to colonel in 1939 and to major general effective December 1, 1942, he was considered unreliable by Erwin von Witzleben and others. He was relieved of his duties in January 1944 and was never reemployed. He was executed at Flossenburg concentration camp on April 9, 1945, after testifying against Admiral Canaris, who was also executed.

16. Earl R. Beck, *Verdict on Schacht* (1955), pp. 125–26.

17. Helldorf was a notorious womanizer and was rumored to be a homosexual as well. Many of his friends were murdered by the SS during the Night of the Long Knives.

18. Addington, p. 57.

19. Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis*, pp. 402–4.

20. Irving, *War Path*, p. 134.

21. IMT, vol. 28, pp. 378–79 (ND 1780-PS).

22. Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis*, pp. 421–27.

23. See Ulrich von Hassell, *The Von Hassell Diaries, 1938–1944* (1979).

24. Taylor, *Munich*, p. 46.

25. Duff Cooper (1890–1954) was a famous author and socialite whose beautiful wife was the Princess Di of her day. He was habitually unfaithful to her.

Cooper remained in parliament after 1938 and played a major role in the fall of the Chamberlain government in May 1940. He then became minister of information in the Churchill cabinet. He was resident minister of Far East Affairs in Singapore in 1941 and became chief British liaison officer to the Free French in 1943. He served as ambassador to Paris from 1944 to 1948. He had earned the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) as a lieutenant in the Grenadier Guards in World War I.

26. Benes fled to London, where he became president of the Czechoslovakian government-in-exile in 1941. He became president of Czechoslovakia again in 1945, but was forced out of office in June 1948 by Stalin and the Czech Communists. He died three months later, a broken man. Benes had been born into a peasant family in Bohemia in 1884, became a journalist, earned a doctorate in sociology, and was a professor at the University of Prague when World War I began. He then became a revolutionary and was the Czechoslovakian foreign minister from 1919 until 1935, when he became president.

27. Harold C. Deutsch, *The Conspiracy Against Hitler in the Twilight War* (1978), p. 41 (hereafter cited as Deutsch, *Twilight*).

28. ''The Fatal Attraction of Adolf Hitler,'' biography, Peter Graves, narrator (A BBC Production in Association with the Arts and Entertainment Network, 1989).

CHAPTER XI

THE WEHRMACHT EXPANDS TOO RAPIDLY

With the occupation of the Sudetenland completed, General Seutter von Loetzen, the erstwhile commander of the 7th Army, resumed his retirement, as did Baron von Hammerstein, Ritter von Leeb, and Wilhelm Adam, who, because of his dispute with Hitler over the value of the West Wall, was never reemployed. On November 1, 1938, Colonel General von Rundstedt retired at the age of 63. He was named honorary colonel of the 18th Infantry Regiment and was replaced as commander of Army Group 1 in Berlin by Fedor von Bock. Ludwig Beck made known his desire to succeed von Bock as commander of Army Group 3 at Dresden, but Hitler would not allow it, so he resigned on October 19. At the end of the month, he was retired with an honorary promotion to colonel general and was named honorary colonel of the 5th Artillery Regiment.[1]

The new vacancies were generally filled on the basis of seniority. Erwin von Witzleben assumed command of Army Group 2 in Frankfurt-am-Main, replacing Adam. He was succeeded as commander of Wehrkreis III in Berlin by General of Artillery Curt Haase, a man not inclined to participate in an anti-Hitler coup, much less to lead one. Johannes Blaskowitz went to Dresden as commander of Army Group 3, and Guenther von Kluge was given command of the newly created Army Group 6 at Hanover. Meanwhile, both Wilhelm Keitel and Erhard Milch were promoted to colonel general, and Heinz Guderian became a general of panzer troops on November 1, 1938.

There was ample reason for these promotions: the entire Wehrmacht was rearming at an extremely rapid pace—in fact, it was rearming too rapidly, both from a military and an economic point of view. Wilhelm Deist wrote:

> The speed and the almost unrestricted and uncoordinated armament of the armed services along with political factors led to a complete disregard of the

lessons learned from the First World War which had earlier found total acceptance ... the military very early on gave up the idea of a comprehensive economic preparation for war, that is, ''armament in depth.''[2]

A good example of the result of this unbridled haste is the Officers' Corps. In June 1935, General Victor von Schwedler, then the chief of the Army Personnel Office, firmly opposed plans for any significant increase in the size of the army in 1936, because the quality and homogeneity of the Officers' Corps had been significantly reduced by the inclusion of police officers, older (formerly inactive) officers, and NCOs, and even these measures had not been enough to meet the rapidly growing demand for officers. Schwelder's objections, however, had been overridden by General Beck. Beck had gone on record as stating that the Officers' Corps should account for 7 percent of the future army, although a figure of 3 percent would be acceptable for the initial phase of the buildup. Even this figure proved to be unattainable, despite the reduced time required to graduate from the officers' training courses, and the subsequent reduction in the quality of the new second lieutenants. (This loss of quality was not viewed as a particularly serious problem, however, because the German company-grade officer was still outstanding and his training was greatly superior to any opponent he was likely to face.) By October 1935, active officers totaled only 1.7 percent of the army, and even the addition of the supplementary officers (the E officers) brought this figure only to 2.4 percent. Nevertheless, due to the potentially dangerous international situation, General Beck felt that the forced rearmament should continue, even at the risk of further impairing the efficiency of the Officers' Corps.

Hitler wanted even more speed in building up his army. Fritsch and Beck succeeded in moderating his demands somewhat, because they were concerned with the probable adverse effects such haste would have on the operational capabilities of the units. Nevertheless, by the fall of 1936, Fritsch had 36 infantry and three panzer divisions at his disposal, with others in the process of organizing. The army had already reached the size he and Beck had planned for it to reach in the fall of 1939.

Ever since rearmament began, the German Army had expanded its forces by forming new units around a cadre of veteran units. The manpower gaps thus created were filled by replacements and draftees who were trained in short courses. All active duty units thus had a core of experienced officers and NCOs, which enabled newly formed units to reach combat-ready status as rapidly as possible. The drawback to this system, however, was that the internal cohesion of the veteran divisions was lost for a time and could be regained only by extensive training.[3] Also, due to the shortages mentioned above, officers and NCOs

became increasingly difficult to replace. It became common to find sergeants commanding platoons, lieutenants commanding companies, and majors directing battalions. These shortages, of course, would be exacerbated by the war. (Even fairly early in the war, it was not at all unusual to find a captain commanding a battalion.)

The army was also short on reserves and equipment of every description. In 1937 alone, 45 percent of the army's material requirements had to be postponed until 1938, and perhaps later. By the end of 1937, the General Staff estimated that the army could not be ready for war until 1943, and the West Wall would not be ready until 1953.[4] The situation in panzer units was worse than in the infantry. The tank formations were only beginning their company-level training in 1937–38, and the modern PzKw IIIs and IVs were only just coming off the production lines. Small wonder that Beck and others opposed war in 1938. By that time, however, it was clear that the army had lost its struggle for political influence. ''It had no say in the question of peace or war,'' Messerschmidt wrote, ''but simply received Hitler's orders via OKW.''[5]

Because of the fact that the speed of rearmament had exceeded all rational planning, the army was happy to accept help from whatever quarter. We have seen how the RAD provided basic training for potential military recruits and draftees, how the National Socialist Motor Corps was instrumental in providing drivers for the army, and how Blomberg was glad to see the armed SS, that is, provided the scale of SS armament was limited, and the army retained tactical control of the SS formations.

The army also welcomed help from the Hitler Youth. In 1937, OKH established a liaison group with the Hitler Youth (Hitler *Jugend* or HJ), and Baldur von Schirach and General Beck reached an agreement strengthening the Army-HJ partnership in 1938. By 1938, the Hitler Youth provided young men with a kind of military basic training, and the ''special formations'' of the HJ provided driving and maintenance training for 90,000 pre-draft-age boys and young men—training that the overtaxed army would have been hard pressed to provide. These young men were already earmarked for service in the motorized formations of the Wehrmacht. (The Hitler Youth also had several glider units that provided basic aviation training for future pilots, as well as naval units.) Even so, the demands the rapid military expansion placed on the army exceeded its ability to meet them, and many units faced severe shortages in equipment, vehicles, weapons, and trained personnel of every description.

The problems the Luftwaffe faced were worse than those of the army, as we have seen. At a time when revolutionary developments were being made in jet and rocket propulsion, and other technological aspects of air warfare, the leading men of the Luftwaffe were engaged in petty personnel disputes, and the air force stagnated.

The true state of the Luftwaffe was revealed in a three-day staff exercise, conducted in late 1938 by General Helmuth Felmy, the commander of Luftwaffe Command 2 (later 2nd Air Fleet). The study gave clear indications of the technical and tactical shortcomings of the air force. In his afteraction report, General Felmy criticized the slow progress the Luftwaffe was making in tactical training, caused by the too-rapid expansion of the service. Pilots were being rushed to the units without receiving proper instruction in navigation, instrument flying, formation flying, and other areas. He concluded that the Luftwaffe would not be able to launch a successful strategic air war against the United Kingdom until 1942; however, if war broke out before that date, he suggested that the Luftwaffe attack London and other cities in a pure terror-bombing campaign, in the hopes that war hysteria might cause the collapse of morale in large areas of Britain and lead to an early end of the war.

It is highly unlikely that Adolf Hitler knew about any of this. Not air-minded himself, he assumed that the Luftwaffe was being properly managed and left it pretty much alone until well after the war began. Before the start of World War II, he relied almost solely on the reports of Hermann Goering (and an occasional personal inspection of a base or two) to judge the capabilities of the air force. In fact, Hermann Goering was the only Luftwaffe leader with direct access to the Fuehrer, and he did not tell Hitler of the Luftwaffe's weaknesses—assuming that he knew about them himself, which is also quite doubtful.

The final pre-war decisions that eventually contributed in a major way to the collapse of the Luftwaffe involved training. The Training Office was always the stepchild of the Luftwaffe and a neglected one at that. In early 1939, for example, Lieutenant General Bernard Kuehl, the chief of the training branch, requested authorization to establish several new pilot training schools. The General Staff rejected this request, stating that all technical resources were being wholly utilized in the activation of new combat units. Hans Jeschonnek, as Suchenwirth wrote, ''prepared for a lightning war without so much as a sideward glance.''[6] The Fuehrer had said that the war would be a short, blitzkrieg campaign, and Jeschonnek was totally convinced that it would be. Lieutenant Colonel Hermann Plocher, the chief of the Organizational Branch, stressed the need for a buildup in depth for both aircraft and personnel, to ensure a continuous flow of pilots and machines to the wings, to replace losses suffered in combat. Jeschonnek, however, disagreed with this concept and insisted that, if war came, everything the Luftwaffe had was to be committed immediately—including a large portion of the training establishment. The Luftwaffe, in short, was being equipped for breadth, not depth; it was preparing to fight a tactical war but not a strategic one.

As a result of the shortsightedness of the Air General Staff, the training establishment had to enlist the aid of the Hitler Youth and the National Socialist Flying Corps (NSFK). By 1938, the Hitler Youth Flying Corps (*Flieger* HJ) was providing rudimentary instruction in the theory and practice of aviation. Dressed in their Luftwaffe-blue uniforms, the older HJ members flew gliders and could earn their A, B, or C certificates in gliding. By 1938, 74,000 boys were in the Flieger HJ.

More advanced training was provided by the NSFK. So important did it become that Colonel General Alfred ''Bomber'' Keller, an air fleet commander on the Eastern Front, was transferred back to Germany to take charge of the NSFK in 1943. Even before the beginning of the war, the Luftwaffe had to depend on the NSFK (a party organization!) to give primary flight instruction to its pilots. Considering the drawbacks inherent in such a system, the NSFK functioned remarkably well—certainly better than anyone had any right to expect. However, the lack of central control of training did have some serious drawbacks. The NSFK schools were scattered throughout Germany, and each school had its own methods. Primary flight training was, therefore, by no means standardized when the potential aviators arrived at the Luftwaffe training schools. In addition, because of a severe shortage of pilot training schools, even before the war, the German pilots were sent to the squadrons with only 160 hours of flying time—less than half of their British and American counterparts. They lacked training in night flying, instrument flying, advanced navigation, formation flying, and other critical areas. In short, the frontline units were provided with only partially trained replacements and had to finish the process themselves, which further weakened their combat effectiveness—assuming, of course, that the replacements lived long enough to complete the squadron's in-house training program.

Meanwhile, the German Navy prepared for World War II.

Long before he assumed power in 1933, Adolf Hitler had made clear in *Mein Kampf* and in his speeches that he would initiate a policy of reaching continental hegemony. He wanted Lebensraum in the East, not naval competition with England. His entire naval strategy was built on the assumption that there would be no naval war with Britain, and the navy was deliberately kept small, partially so as not to provoke London, and partially because the navy lacked the resources to expand at the rate the army and Luftwaffe did. For these reasons, Hitler had Ribbentrop negotiate and sign the Anglo-German Naval Treaty in London in 1935, which stipulated that the German Navy's maximum strength would never exceed 35 percent of that of the Royal Navy.

Admiral Raeder, the commander-in-chief of the German Navy, welcomed this agreement, for he had no desire to fight the Royal Navy again. As a young officer in the Battle of Jutland in 1916, he was

aboard the *Luetzow* when it was pounded to bits by British warships, and he had been lucky to escape with his life. Raeder, however, went too far in his desire for peace with Great Britain, for he expressly forbade any references to the possibility of a second naval war against England, even in theoretical studies by his staff. Some of Raeder's younger officers objected to this ban on freedom of military thought, but the admiral continued to indulge in strategic wishful thinking right up until May 27, 1938. Only then did Hitler (who did not even pretend to understand naval strategy) summon Raeder to the Reichschancellery and tell him for the first time that he must consider Great Britain as a possible opponent. The Fuehrer demand that the naval warship construction program be speeded up at once.

This was, of course, easier to say than to do, since it takes years to build an effective battle fleet, even with all the resources of a nation at one's disposal. The German Navy was in competition with Hitler's public works programs, such as the Munich subway system, the huge Volkswagen Works, the autobahns, the reconstruction programs in Berlin and Hamburg, and the West Wall fortifications project, as well as with the other two armed services. As a result, the Office of Naval Construction suffered from a shortage of raw materials and the dockyards lacked skilled laborers and welders. Even so, the navy had improved considerably since 1933, in that the vessels at its disposal were almost exclusively modern warships, although its total number of vessels had decreased slightly. The fleet now had three battleships, six light cruisers, seven destroyers, 12 torpedo boats, and 36 submarines (most of them too small for duty in the Atlantic). Under construction were four battleships (the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau*, *Bismarck*, and *Tripitz*), two aircraft carriers, five heavy cruisers (the *Bluecher*, *Hipper*, *Prinz Eugen*, *Seydlitz,* and *Luetzow*), 15 destroyers, 18 torpedo boats, and 36 submarines. Of these, two battleships (the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*), one heavy cruiser (the *Hipper*), 14 destroyers, and 21 submarines would be in service by the fall of 1939 (that is, by the outbreak of the war).[7] The Royal Navy was vastly superior in every category.

Admiral Raeder's first step was to order a bright young staff officer, Commander Hellmuth Heye, to work out a plan of action against the United Kingdom. Then he appointed a planning committee under the chairmanship of Vice Admiral Guenther Guse, the deputy chief of staff, to study the Heye Plan and to make suggestions for a ''strategic basis on which the Navy can be built.'' Raeder himself did not sit in on the deliberations of the Guse Committee, which met for the first time on September 23, 1938—less than a year before the outbreak of the war.[8]

Heye's ideas were far ahead of current German naval thought. He began by frankly admitting Germany's naval inferiority and stating that ''the problems of a campaign at sea against Britain cannot be

solved by means of a battle fleet.... Britain's vulnerability lies in her maritime communications. This postulates that all resources should be applied to mercantile warfare.''[9]

This conclusion came as a nasty shock to some of the older members of the committee, who had been taught their entire careers to measure fleets by the number of battleships they had. The 43-year-old Heye was soon in an uncomfortable position, for he had attacked a sacred cow, and it was obvious that the older and higher-ranking members of the committee did not agree with Heye's heresy at all. To his credit, Guse would not allow the other members of the committee to attempt to browbeat or intimidate Heye, even though he personally did not agree with the young officer. Gradually, two possible paths of development became clear: (1) a long-term program, to build a navy centered around a complete battle fleet, centered around battleships, as advocated by Admiral Guse, Captain Kurt Fricke (the chief of operations on the Supreme Naval Staff or SKL), and others; (2) a short-term program, to create the basis for an effective war at sea. There were two alternatives for the second path: (1) build a strong submarine fleet, as advocated by Captain Karl Doenitz, the chief of the U-boat branch, or (2) build a cruiser fleet, with a core of *Panzerschiffe* (armored cruisers or ''pocket battleships''), as advocated by Heye and Rear Admiral Werner Fuchs, the chief of the department.[10] The committee rejected the submarine alternative out of hand and basically boiled the issue of German naval strategy down to whether the construction of battleships or the lighter and faster ''pocket battleships'' were to be given priority for construction, and how dockyard capacity could best be extended or exploited.

The value of the submarine at this time was grossly underestimated in naval circles throughout the world. Even the Royal Navy looked upon the submarine as a weapon that had outlived its usefulness and, as late as December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, they concentrated against the U.S. battle fleet, not against the nearby American submarines; yet the U.S. submarine arm was to do the Japanese Empire much greater harm than the outmoded battleships. The prevailing view in naval thought at that time, however, was that the U-boat had already had its moment of glory during World War I, but had been defeated. Even Heye wrote: ''In an offensive war at sea one should not expect too far-reaching results from U-boats alone,'' because British anti-submarine defenses ''had reached an advance stage of development.... Generally speaking, U-boats operating as single units cannot, due to their very nature be considered as an effective striking force on the high seas.''[11]

Captain Doenitz was never given a chance to air his views before the Guse Committee, and the construction of a German fleet based primarily on the submarine was never seriously considered. Based on the

recommendations of the Guse Committee, Admiral Raeder presented the Fuehrer with two alternatives: (1) construct a force consisting mainly of pocket battleships, which could be ready fairly soon and ''could in the event of war present a considerable threat to Britain's lifelines'' or (2) construct a force consisting mainly of battleships, which would take longer to build, but ''could not only threaten Britain's lifelines but also engage the British High Seas Fleet with every prospect of success.'' (According to his postwar memoirs, Raeder's first alternative suggested a force of ''submarines and pocket battleships,'' but the records of the German Supreme Naval Staff do not support this claim.)[12] In any case, Raeder's memorandum to Hitler was worded in such a manner that he could have been in little doubt that Hitler, with his passion for building large things—be they architectural designs, public buildings, parades, or armed forces—would choose the alternative that offered the greatest glory to the German Reich. He was quite correct: Hitler chose the battleship or ''big ship'' alternative, just as Raeder, a ''big ship'' man, hoped he would.

As a rule of thumb at that time, it took three and a half years for 10,000 skilled workers to construct a 35,000-ton battleship. In fairness to Raeder, it must be noted that, during a meeting in late 1938, he warned the Fuehrer: ''If war breaks out in the next year or two, our fleet won't be ready.''

Hitler replied loftily, ''For my political aims I shall not need the Fleet before 1946.''[13]

Erich Raeder, who had been promoted to Generaladmiral on April 20, 1936,[14] believed Hitler, just as he had believed him in 1933, when he said there would never be a naval war against Great Britain. He believed him in spite of the fact that the Sudetenland Crisis had brought the world to the brink of war only three months before. In any case, he set out to construct his ''big ship'' fleet as if he would have seven years to complete it. The result was the famous Z-Plan (''Z'' for Ziel, or target), which Raeder submitted to Hitler on January 17, 1939. This new construction plan called for Germany to have six Type H battleships (of more than 56,000 tons displacement and armed with 420-millimeter guns) by the beginning of 1948, in addition to four *Bismarck*-class battleships, which displaced 41,700 to 42,900 tons—a total of 10 large battleships in all. It was have four aircraft carriers,[15] pocket battleships (to be used as surface raiders), five heavy cruisers, 44 smaller cruisers, 68 destroyers, 90 torpedo boats, and 222 U-boats. Hitler approved the plan on January 27. As a result, in the few months remaining before the outbreak of the war, the navy expended precious resources on a program based on the wrong assumptions. The Z-Plan would never even be fractionally fulfilled.

NOTES

1. To be named the honorary colonel of a regiment was a great honor for a German officer. Rundstedt wore his colonel's uniform for the rest of his career—even after he became a field marshal. (When he was occasionally mistaken for a colonel, Rundstedt only laughed.) Adam, the ''father'' of the mountain troops branch, was named honorary colonel of the 98th Mountain Regiment and Ewald von Kleist was named honorary colonel of the 8th Cavalry Regiment.
2. Deist, *Rearmament*, p. 111.
3. Bernhard R. Kroener, ''Squaring the Circle: The Blitzkrieg Strategy and Manpower Shortage, 1939-1942,'' in Deist, *Total War*, p. 295 (hereafter cited as Kroener, ''Manpower Shortage'').
4. Messerschmidt, *Effectiveness*, p. 236.
5. Ibid., p. 225.
6. Suchenwirth, ''Command.''
7. Deist, *Rearmament*, pp. 81–82.
8. Cajus Bekker, *Hitler's Naval War* (1974), p. 28 (hereafter cited as Bekker, *Naval War*).
9. Ibid., pp. 29–30; Deulffer, ''Naval Policy,'' p. 15.
10. Bekker, *Naval War*, p. 31.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 34; Erich Raeder, *My Life*, Henry W. Drexel, trans. (1960).
13. Bekker, *Naval War*, p. 34.
14. *Generaladmiral* was the second highest rank in the German Navy and was equivalent to full admiral (that is, a four-star admiral) in the U.S. Navy.
15. Friedrich Ruge, *Der Seekrieg* (1977), p. 36 (hereafter cited as Ruge, *Seekrieg*).

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CHAPTER XII

THE FALL OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Hitler was in an angry mood for weeks after the signing of the Munich Accords, because he was convinced that Britain cheated him of what he wanted and what he decided Germany needed: all of Czechoslovakia. Not only did he view the annexation of the entire country as part of the Reich's natural Lebensraum, it was a prerequisite to Germany's drive to the East because it tied down 25 German divisions, even with its fortifications in German hands. The Czechoslovak frontier still formed a deep enclave in German territory, which would still have to be guarded and would be difficult to hold in time of war. Military occupation of Czechoslovakia would present other significant advantages. Seizure of the Czechoslovak Army equipment and the Skoda Works (which had a capacity for producing weapons that was second only to the Krupp industries in Europe) would represent a major reinforcement to the German Army. Finally, seizure of Czechoslovakia would relieve the economic strain that rearmament was beginning to put on the German economy, and Hitler could certainly use the country's gold reserve, foreign currency, manpower resources, and agricultural production.

Within a few weeks after Munich, Hitler ordered Goebbels to change the entire focus of German propaganda. The ''pacifist record,'' as Hitler called it, was turned off, and the nation was psychologically prepared for war. Hitler warned his people that the leadership in Great Britain could change at any time; Chamberlain could be replaced by warmongers, such as Cooper, Eden, or Churchill. The Reich was also warned of the fact that it was being systematically encircled by foreign powers, of the dangers of Bolshevism, of the need for living space, and so forth.[1]

The rump Republic of Czechoslovakia was now trying to bring its policies in line with Hitler's, largely because it was now isolated and,

without its fortifications, was completely at the mercy of the Reich. It retired or dismissed all Jewish officers from the armed forces; banned the Communist Party; dismissed all Jewish teachers from German schools; passed its own Nuremberg Laws against the Jews; and even turned over part of its gold reserve to the Reichsbank. These moves did it no good, however, because Hitler was determined to seize the first opportunity to occupy the entire country.

Hitler's tactics in dealing with Czechoslovakia were similar to those he used in Austria and the Sudetenland; while Nazis and Nazi-sympathizers (called "fifth columnists") agitated and caused confusion and disunity inside the country, Hitler applied pressure from the outside. By early 1939, the government in Prague was faced with two choices: act against the separatists movements in Slovakia and Ruthenia or watch the state disintegrate. On March 6, President Hacha acted. He dismissed the autonomous government in Ruthenia and, on the night of March 9–10, threw out the separatist Slovakian government and replaced it with one of his own, which was headed by Karol Sidor. On the morning of the 10th, he declared martial law in Slovakia and ordered the arrest of Ferdinand Durcansky (the German deputy provincial premier), and Monsignor Jozef Tiso, the deposed provincial premier.

Hacha's resolute action took Adolf Hitler completely by surprise. In Czechoslovakia, however, the German minority acted quickly. In Slovakia, some of the Slovak leaders were reluctant to act as a German fifth column, now that the moment for action had come. They were forced back in line by Franz Karmasin, the head of the Brownshirts in Slovakia, and his well-organized German minority. Meanwhile, arms from Austria were smuggled across the Danube River and distributed to the Storm Troopers. Before the day was over, Karmasin's followers had occupied most of the government buildings in the Slovakian capital.

By the morning of March 11, Hitler had already decided to take Bohemia and Moravia, by force if necessary. He ordered Keitel to draft an ultimatum, calling on the Czechs to surrender without resistance, and the foreign office announced that Tiso, the deposed Slovak premier, had appealed to Hitler for help, even though he had done no such thing.

Meanwhile, at Adolf Hitler's insistence, Monsignor Tiso visited him at the Chancellery in Berlin.

Tiso was not the type of person to impress Hitler. He was a short, fat Catholic priest who liked to eat half of a pound of ham when he got excited, to soothe his nerves. The Fuehrer received Tiso and Durcansky at 7:40 P.M. on Monday, March 13. Also present were Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop and Generals Keitel and von Brauchitsch. Hitler began the conference by denouncing the attitude of the Slovaks. After Munich, he said, he had prevented the Hungarians from occupying Slovakia, because he had been led to believe that the Slovaks wanted

independence. But now Sidor declared that he would oppose the separation of Slovakia from Czechoslovakia. The Slovaks had disappointed him, he said. Hitler now explained that he had brought Tiso to Berlin to determine whether Slovakia wanted to conduct her own affairs or not; if not, he would disinterest himself in the province. He added that he expected the Slovaks to clear up this question in a matter of hours, not days, or it would be left to the mercy of events.

At this point, Ribbentrop conveniently produced a dispatch, reporting Hungarian troop movements on the Slovak frontier. Tiso knew, as did everyone else, that Hungary would be delighted to re-annex Slovakia, a prospect that the Slovak leaders found particularly odious. Virtually presented with a choice of some form of autonomy under the Germans or occupation by the hated Magyar, Tiso telephoned Bratislava and requested that the Slovak parliament be summoned for a meeting at 10 o'clock the following morning. By noon on March 14, Slovakia had declared its independence; the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia had begun.

Meanwhile, the German Army concentrated on the frontiers of Bohemia and Moravia. The front pages of German newspapers were monopolized by violent stories about a ''Czech Terror'' against the German minorities in Czeckoslovakia. Some of the more observant readers noticed that they were the same stories that had appeared eight months before, during the Sudetenland Crisis. Only the dates and place names had been changed.

As Hitler had predicted, Chamberlain quickly took the succession of Slovakia as an excuse not to honor his guarantees to Prague, further lowering Hitler's already low estimation of his resolve and leaving Czechoslovakia (or what was left of it) totally isolated. On the afternoon of March 14, President Hacha and Foreign Minister Chvalkovsky decided to make one last, desperate attempt to avert disaster: they would make a direct, personal appeal to Adolf Hitler. The Fuehrer quickly agreed to see them. The pair had to travel to the German capital by train, because Hacha could not fly, due to a serious heart condition. An hour before they left Prague, they received an ultimatum from Budapest, demanding the immediate withdrawal of all Czech troops from Ruthenia. The Hungarians were staking their claims. Before they reached the border, they learned that German troops had already occupied the important industrial center of Moravska Ostrava.

The two Czech officials arrived at the Anhalt Station in Berlin at 10:40 P.M. and were taken to the Chancellery, but it was after 1 A.M. on March 15 before they were ushered into the Fuehrer's study. Present were Hitler, Keitel, Goering, Ribbentrop, Weizseacker, and Dr. Theodor Morell, Hitler's personal physician.

Hacha began the discussion by making a pathetic attempt to ingratiate himself with Hitler and to soften the Fuehrer's attitude. He practically

begged him to allow the Czechs to continue their own national life. When he had finished, Hitler reviewed the course of recent events, totally rewriting history as he went. Prague, he concluded, had failed to break with the old ways of Benes and Masaryk; because of this fact, he had lost confidence in the Czech government and had issued the appropriate orders. The German Army, he announced, would invade Czechoslovakia at 6 A.M. that very morning. Hacha was horrified; it was already almost 2 A.M. Hitler advised Hacha to withdraw to an adjacent room with his foreign minister, to discuss what should be done next.

Hacha and Chvalkovsky were taken into another room, where they were joined by Goering and Ribbentrop. When the Luftwaffe commander threatened to destroy Prague by aerial bombardment, Hacha fainted. He was revived by an injection from Dr. Morell. When he regained consciousness, he was allowed to telephone Prague and order the Czech Army not to resist the German advance. Just before 4 A.M., Hacha and Foreign Minister Frantisek Chvalkovsky signed a previously prepared communique, which stated that Hitler had received Hacha at the president's request, and Hacha had asked the Fuehrer to assume responsibility for the Czech people. The German Army crossed the frontier two hours later; Blaskowitz's army group occupied Bohemia while List's forces, coming up from Austria, took over Moravia. Czechoslovakia had ceased to exist. ''This is the most wonderful day of my life!'' Hitler exclaimed to his secretaries. ''I have now accomplished what others strove in vain for centuries to achieve. Bohemia and Moravia are back in the Reich. I will go down as the greatest German of all time!''[2]

Hitler spent that night in Hradschin Castle, the ancient seat of the kings of Bohemia, high on the hill overlooking the Moldau River and the city of Prague. The following morning he reaffirmed the ancient German claim to Bohemia and Moravia, which, he said, were part of Germany's Lebensraum. Then he issued a decree, establishing the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. As a sop to the opinion of the Western powers, he named a ''moderate,'' Baron von Neurath, as the first Reich Protector. Later, the army created a new military district, Wehrkreis Bohemia and Moravia, to form new units and oversee military training and administration in the region. Real power, however, lay in the hands of the head of the Civil Administration and his state secretary. To these offices, Hitler appointed the leaders of the Sudeten Germans, Konrad Henlein and Karl Hermann Frank, respectively. Before long, real power had passed into the hands of Heinrich Himmler, who made Frank the chief of police and ranking SS officer in the Protectorate.

Meanwhile, Hitler received a telegram from Tiso, asking him to take Slovakia under his protection as well. The Fuehrer consented, and German troops moved in. Ruthenia had also declared its independence on March 14, as the Republic of Carpatho-Ukraine, but Hitler was no

longer interested in it. At 6 A.M. on March 15—at the same moment the German Army entered Czechoslovakia—the Hungarian Army marched into Ruthenia and occupied it, establishing the common frontier with Poland that both parties had wanted for years.

With this occupation, Hitler had once again proven himself a master opportunist, whose goals remained remarkably consistent. The establishment of the Protectorate did not mark a change in Hitler's policy, most of which had been revealed in *Mein Kampf* a dozen years before. Most of the world, however, had not bothered to read Hitler's book, and, to it, the occupation of Czechoslovakia destroyed a great many illusions, even among the Germans. The vast majority of the people in Great Britain felt the same way. Always before, there had been a certain amount of sympathy for Hitler in Britain. When he rearmed, many people thought (with considerable justification) he was just demanding the same rights for Germany that every other country in the world enjoyed. When he occupied the Rhineland, Austria, and the Sudetenland, they felt he was merely bringing Germans back into the German Reich, and they did not see anything particularly objectionable in that. With the occupation of Czechoslovakia, however, the scales fell from their eyes. In no way could this territory be considered German; this was pure, naked aggression. Public opinion felt that, this time, Hitler should have been stopped, and since he was not, he should be stopped if he tried it again.

Neville Chamberlain also experienced what Shirer called ''a great awakening.''[3] On March 18, he delivered a hastily rewritten speech at his home city of Birmingham. In it, he admitted that Adolf Hitler had deceived him when he said that the Sudetenland was his last territorial claim in Europe. He renounced appeasement and did a complete policy reversal. From now on, he said, Nazi aggression would be resisted. Less than two weeks later, on March 31, he spoke before the House of Commons and guaranteed the independence of Poland. The French government, he added, had authorized him to state that it took exactly the same position. The following month, the United Kingdom instituted the first peacetime conscription act in her history—a sure indication that London intended to pursue a firmer policy to German expansion.

The stage was set for World War II.

NOTES

1. Wilhelm Deist, Manfred Messerschmidt, Hans-Erich Volkmann, and Wolfram Wette. et al, ''Causes and Preconditions of German Aggression,'' in *The German Military in the Age of Total War,* Wilhelm Deist, ed. (1985), pp. 349–52.
2. Irving, *War Path*, pp. 190–91.
3. Shirer, p. 453.

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CHAPTER XIII
OVER THE EDGE

''The obvious weakness of Hitler's policy,'' historian Alan Bullock wrote, ''the fault which destroyed him as surely as it had destroyed Napoleon, was his inability to stop.''[1]

No truer words were ever written. The Fuehrer's next target was Danzig, a Germanic city of 400,000 people that had been annexed by Prussia in 1793, during the second partition of Poland. It was the capital of West Prussia until 1920, when the Treaty of Versailles made it an independent international entity under the supervision of the League of Nations, which allowed Poland to virtually monopolize the commerce of the city, although it never gave Warsaw the military and political domination it wanted.

Beginning in 1924, with the aid of French and Dutch engineers, the Poles built their own harbor at Gdynia, within a few miles of Danzig. By 1938, this city had a population of more than 100,000 people and had diverted much of the trade from Danzig. As early as 1933, Gdynia surpassed Danzig in total freight turnover, and Danzig stagnated economically. Not only was it cut off from West Prussia, it was now bypassed by Polish merchants, who preferred to use their own port. ''Under these circumstances Danzig was denied the means of making an independent livelihood,'' one resident recalled. ''The wharves and warehouses grew quieter and emptier.... It became increasingly obvious that Danzig's only hope of survival was to turn to one of her big neighbors for help.''[2] Not coincidentally, 1933 was the first year that the Free City elected gave the Nazi Party an absolute majority in its *Volkstag* (city council).

Within a week of his bloodless victory at Munich, Hitler sent his foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, to a luncheon with the Polish ambassador, Jozef Lipski. During their three-hour meeting, Ribbentrop requested that Danzig be returned to the Reich and that Germany be

given extraterritorial rights in the Polish Corridor, so that it could build a railroad from the Reich to the city.

On October 31, 1938, Polish Foreign Minister Colonel Jozef Beck sent Ambassador Lipski detailed instructions on how to reply to Ribbentrop's demands. Basically, Beck's response was a polite refusal. He offered to replace the League of Nations guarantee with some kind of a German-Polish arrangement, but that was as far as he was willing to go. He added that any German attempt to occupy the Free City would lead to a conflict.

Beck obviously believed that one concession to Hitler would lead to another demand. If he gave in on the issue of Danzig and the railroad, Hitler would probably demand the cession of all or parts of the provinces of Posen (Poznan) or Polish Silesia. Beck also saw that, if Poland allied with Germany against the Soviet Union, it would soon be reduced to the status of a vassal state of the Reich. He therefore maintained his determined stand until the very end.

There were many similarities in the governments in Warsaw and Berlin in the mid-1930s. Both were totalitarian and anti-Semitic, and both pursued territorial claims against Czechoslovakia. Poland's part in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, however, was short-sighted. Once Czechoslovakia lost the Sudetenland (and her fortifications), it was helpless; and once Czechoslovakia fell to the Nazis, Poland was flanked on three sides by the Reich, lost the potential support of 35 Czech divisions, and was in a hopeless military position. In fact, after the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, Poland's military position was worse than Prague's had been, because almost all of Poland was generally flat, lacked defensive barriers, and was not as well equipped to fight a war as Czechoslovakia had been.

The Nazis did not waste any time in pressing their advantage. On March 21, six days after the Wehrmacht entered Czechoslovakia, Ribbentrop again met with the Polish ambassador. This time, however, he was in an arrogant and unfriendly mood—an attitude that was more characteristic of him. He demanded the highway, the railroad, and the prompt return of Danzig. He pointed out that Poland's position, between Germany and the Soviet Union, was militarily hopeless; and that the Fuehrer was Warsaw's only hope. Lipski was then dismissed, to think about Ribbentrop's comments.

Meanwhile, Hitler had other fish to fry. For years he had been demanding the return of Memelland, which had been handed over to Lithuania by the League of Nations. Historically, Memel was the northern and easternmost city in East Prussia. After World War I, however, it was taken over by the League on behalf of Lithuania, even though the Lithuanians living in Memel considered themselves Prussians and did not want to be separated from the Reich. The Allies, however,

wanted the new Republic of Lithuania, which had separated itself from Bolshevik Russia, to have access to the sea, so Lithuania was given the Memelland district (1,000 square miles).

Germany never did accept the loss of Memelland. For some time, NSDAP and SS leaders had been organizing the German majority in that district and had been creating incidents and disturbances, *a la* Austria and the Sudetenland. On March 20, 1939, Ribbentrop met with Juozas Urbays, the Lithuanian foreign minister, who was on his way home after a visit to Rome. Ribbentrop demanded the return of Memelland; if Lithuania did not comply, the German foreign minister implied, Hitler would seize it.

Events moved rapidly after that. On March 21, State Secretary Baron Ernst von Weizsaecker notified the Lithuanians that they had better rush a plenipotentiary to Berlin by special airplane the next day, with authority to sign away Memelland. The next day, March 22, Hitler and Admiral Raeder put to sea from Swinemuende, aboard the pocket battleship *Deutschland*, with a sizable task force, heading for Memel. They were joined by troop ships, and the divisions of General Georg von Kuechler's I Corps concentrated along Lithuania's southern frontier. The implications were clear.

The Lithuanian representatives arrived in Berlin on the afternoon of March 22, and it was questionable for a time whether they would capitulate or whether Hitler and the navy would have to fight their way into Memel. However, at 1 A.M. on March 23, the Lithuanians gave in and signed. Hitler entered Memel and addressed a frenzied German crowd at the Stadttheater at 2:30 P.M. It was his last bloodless conquest.

The Fuehrer returned to Berlin on March 24, no doubt happy to be back on dry land, because he had been seasick most of the past three days. When he arrived, he found that Hans-Adolf von Moltke, the German ambassador to Warsaw, had signaled the Foreign Office that Polish reservists had been called up. The following day, Admiral Canaris reported that Poland had mobilized three classes of reservists and were concentrating their forces around Danzig. General Keitel did not think this was a serious matter, but OKH was not so sure. Hitler, however, still did not believe that he would have to resort to war to obtain Danzig. He called in Brauchitsch and told the army commander-in-chief that Danzig would be seized only if Ambassador Lipski gave him an indication that Warsaw would prefer to be presented with a *fait accompli*.

He had grossly underestimated Polish determination. On March 28, Jozef Beck called in Ambassador von Moltke and informed him that any attempt by Germany or the Nazi-dominated Danzig Senate to alter the status of the Free City would be regarded as a *casus belli* by Poland. ''You want to negotiate at the point of a bayonet!'' Moltke cried.

''That is your own method,'' Beck responded.[3]

On the evening of March 30, fresh rumors about an allegedly imminent German attack against the Free City led the British to ask Beck whether or not he would object to a unilateral British guarantee of Poland's independence as an interim measure until a formal agreement between the two countries could be reached. Beck agreed immediately, and, the following day, Chamberlain made his historic declaration to the House of Commons, unilaterally siding with Poland against possible German aggression. He had done, Shirer wrote, ''exactly what for more than a year he had stoutly asserted that Britain would never do; he had left to another nation the decision whether his country would go to war.''[4] It also clearly signaled to Hitler that his tactics of taking on one nation at a time would no longer work.

Predictably, Chamberlain's declaration threw Hitler into one of his rages. He stormed around the room, pounded his fists on the table, and shouted hatred against the English. ''I'll cook them a stew they'll choke on!'' he roared in the general direction of Admiral Canaris, who happened to be with him when the news arrived.[5]

By April 3, Adolf Hitler had already begun his drift toward war. He issued a directive to his military commanders, ordering them to prepare for three contingencies: (1) defense of the frontiers; (2) Operation White; and (3) seizure of Danzig. Operation White was the most serious of the three: it was the codename for the invasion and conquest of Poland. Hitler instructed that the generals be prepared to carry it out from September 1 on.[6]

Meanwhile, the German Army continued to grow and, by 1939, had a war establishment of 2.75 million men, of whom 730,000 were in the active army and 500,000 were Class I reservists. No new active divisions were created between January 1 and August 1939, although several independent regiments and battalions were organized, as well as several *Landwehr* units (made up primarily of men between 35 and 45 years old). In addition, Headquarters, XIX Motorized Corps was formed in Vienna, under the command of Heinz Guderian. Erich Hoepner succeeded him as commander of the XVI Motorized Corps.

The army also created several new frontier guard (*Grenzschutz*) units. They were all non-motorized formations, made up of local, older reservists, border police, customs officials, paramilitary units, a great many Brownshirts, a few SS reservists, and regular police of all ages, as well as conscripts from the local population. To conceal their military nature, a frontier guard regiment was called a sector (*Abschnitt*) and the battalion a subsector (*Unterabschnitt*). Their officers, however, were mainly active duty regulars, and the Abschnitts gradually assumed the character of reserve infantry regiments. By the summer of 1939, Germany had more than 200,000 of these border troops, including 100,000 in the West, 60,000 along the Polish border with the Reich

proper, and more than 30,000 in East Prussia.[7] Most of the Frontier Guard Commands (*Grenzschutz-Abschnittskommando*) were eventually upgraded to headquarters for corps designed to conduct defensive operations or occupation duties. They were poorly suited for offensive operations, mainly because they lacked organic artillery units and had only a signal company, as opposed to a battalion in a normal corps headquarters. These corps commands, which were first activated in late 1939, could be (and often were) upgraded to full corps headquarters with augmentation.

After Munich, it was impossible to organize effective opposition to Nazi Germany in Eastern Europe without the help of the Soviet Union. Chamberlain, however, was reluctant to draw this conclusion. Up until the signing of the Munich Protocols, the Soviet Union had consistently advocated united action against the Third Reich but had always been ignored or rebuffed. Consequently, on October 3, 1938—four days after the Soviets had been deliberately excluded from the conference table at Munich—the Soviet counselor of the German Embassy in Moscow informed Berlin that Stalin would draw certain conclusions from the Sudetenland agreement and would develop a more positive attitude toward the Third Reich. On May 3—after London rejected another Soviet diplomatic overture—Stalin sacked Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov (a Jewish diplomat who had an English wife) and replaced him with Vyacheslav Molotov. This change clearly indicated a fundamental shift in Soviet policy. Litvinov, a dedicated anti-Nazi, was a fervent proponent of collective security and a strong advocate of a French-British-Soviet alliance against Germany. By relieving Litvinov, Stalin clearly indicated that he thought these policies had failed. This opinion was further confirmed on May 8, when London finally rejected Litvinov's April 16 proposal for a military alliance. As a result, the Soviets intensified their approach to Berlin.

While Stalin reoriented his foreign policy toward the Reich, Hitler now pressed for a military alliance with Mussolini, despite the Wehrmacht's low opinion of the Italian armed forces and Italy's military capabilities.

By mid-April 1939, Italian Foreign Minister Ciano was alarmed by increasing signs that Germany might attack Poland at any time and precipitate a general war for which Italy was not prepared. On May 6, he met with Ribbentrop at Milan, where, in accordance with the written instructions sent to him by Mussolini, Ciano emphasized that Italy wanted to avoid war for at least three years. To Ciano's surprise, von Ribbentrop readily agreed, and said, ''Germany, too, is convinced of the necessity of a period of peace, which should not be less than four or five years [in length].[8] After dinner, Mussolini telephoned his son-in-law and asked how the talks had gone. Ciano replied that they had

gone well. The Duce then told him to issue a press release, stating that Italy and Germany had decided to conclude a military alliance. Thus, on a sudden impulse, Mussolini committed himself to Nazi Germany, after more than a year's hesitation. The formal alliance, called the ''Pact of Steel,'' was signed in Berlin on May 22, with great pomp and circumstance.

The following day, Adolf Hitler summoned his military commanders to the study of the Chancellery and gave them insight into his thoughts and plans. Fourteen officers were invited to this lecture, including Goering, Keitel, Warlimont, Brauchitsch, Halder, Milch, Jeschonnek, Lieutenant General Karl Bodenschatz (Goering's liaison officer to Fuehrer Headquarters), Raeder, *Generaladmiral* Hermann Boehm (the fleet commander), *Generaladmiral* Conrad Albrecht (the commander of the German naval forces in the Baltic), Rear Admiral Otto Schniewind (the new chief of staff at SKL), Lieutenant Colonel Rudolf Schmundt (Hitler's OKW adjutant), Captain Nicolaus von Below (Hitler's Luftwaffe adjutant), and Captain Gerhard Engel (Hitler's army adjutant). Only Schmundt was allowed to take notes, but these have survived,[9] which is fortunate, since this was a very important meeting indeed.

Here, for the first time, Hitler frankly told his commanders that further successes could not come without war, which was therefore inevitable and should be anticipated in 1943–44. Germany's economic problems, including the safeguarding of her food supplies, he said, could be solved only by obtaining more Lebensraum *in Europe*. Once again, he ruled out the colonial solution, stating that colonies could easily be cut off by blockade in the event of war. Lebensraum in Europe, however, could be accomplished only by shedding blood. ''It is not Danzig that is at stake. For us it is a matter of expanding our living space in the East and making our food supplies secure and also of solving the problems of the Baltic States.''

''There is no question of sparing Poland,'' Schmundt recorded, ''and we are left with the decision: to attack Poland at the first opportunity. We cannot expect a repetition of the Czech affair. There will be war. Our task is to isolate Poland. Success in isolating here will be decisive.''

''The Fuehrer doubts whether a peaceful settlement with England is possible. It is necessary to be prepared for a showdown.''

England, Hitler added, ''is the motivating force driving against Germany.'' He then discussed her strengths and weaknesses:

> The Briton himself is proud, brave, tough, dogged and a gifted organizer. He knows how to exploit every new development. He has the love of adventure and the courage of the Nordic race. . . .
>
> England is a world power in herself. Constant for three hundred years. Increased by alliances. This power is to be regarded as embracing the whole world not only physically but psychologically.

Add to this immeasurable wealth and the solvency that goes with it.
Geopolitical security and protection by a strong sea power and courageous air force.

Britain, however, also had weaknesses. It was no longer necessary to invade Great Britain to defeat her. In the past, England could feed herself. This was no longer true. Today, the Fuehrer said, Germany could defeat England. The first objective would be to protect the Ruhr; therefore, Belgium and Holland would have to be seized. If the Wehrmacht could occupy the Low Countries and defeat France, the basis for a successful air and sea (that is, submarine) blockade against the United Kingdom would have been created. The German objective, he said, would always be to force Britain to its knees.[10]

Hitler thus clearly outlined the overall German strategy, as well as the history of the first year of World War II.

Finally, Hitler concluded, it was essential to maintain secrecy. Italy and Japan were to be kept ignorant of the Reich's objectives. Even the General Staff of the Army was not to be fully informed. A small staff, working under the supervision of OKW, was to be set up to do the planning.

In fact, this staff had been hard at work for some time. It was called ''Working Staff Rundstedt,'' after its titular head, Colonel General Gerd von Rundstedt. But the 64-year-old General von Rundstedt did not work hard and had not done so for years. The real work was done by the other two members of the staff: Lieutenant General Erich von Manstein and Colonel Guenther Blumentritt. On May 7, more than two weeks before Hitler's meeting with his senior commanders, they had submitted their estimate of the situation and scheme of maneuver for Operation White. It was the fundamental plan on which the invasion of Poland was based.

The naval plan for the invasion of Poland was submitted on May 16. It envisioned the entrance to the Baltic Sea being protected by Germany's two operational battleships, two pocket battleships, and submarines. The remaining submarines were to prepare for war in the Atlantic. The only naval forces directly involved in the invasion of Poland consisted of an obsolete battleship, earmarked to shell Polish coastal positions near Danzig, and a few auxiliary vessels.

While the fruitless diplomatic maneuvering continued throughout the summer of 1939, Germany prepared for war. By the end of June, an SA Freikorps of 4,000 men was being formed in Danzig, and Brownshirts were secretly preparing defensive positions at night. By June 15, Hitler had plans for the invasion of Poland, and four days later, OKH informed the foreign office that 168 German Army officers had been granted permission to travel through the Free State in civilian clothes

for study purposes. Actually, their tasks involved preparations to seize the Free City upon the outbreak of war and to hold it against expected Polish counterattacks. A few days later, on June 23, OKW presented Hitler with a detailed timetable for the attack, under which the reservists could be called up for war duty, on the pretext of being activated for autumn maneuvers.

Meanwhile, more disturbances rocked Danzig and the German minority areas in Poland, including the Polish Corridor region and the provinces of Upper Silesia and Poznan (Posen). Polish customs officials were armed and told to fire on German civilians, if that was what it took to carry out their functions. Adolf Hitler was, of course, infuriated by this display of independence on the part of a Slavic (i.e., racially inferior) people. A sharp exchange of diplomatic notes between Warsaw and Berlin followed, each warning the other of the consequences of pursuing their present policies.

Adolf Hitler was already considering a radical shift in policy—not in relation to Warsaw, but toward Moscow. The Soviet Union made fresh economic overtures to Berlin on July 18, and trade talks resumed in Berlin. The Soviets wanted to negotiate by degrees, but Hitler, in a hurry to invade Poland, could not wait. On Monday, August 14, Ribbentrop sent Ambassador Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg instructions to read a communication from the Wilhelmstrasse to Molotov word for word, indicating (in diplomatic language) that Germany was ready to divide up Eastern Europe and Poland with the Soviet Union and to lay the final foundations for Soviet-German relations. Schulenburg was to see Stalin and read it to him as well, if possible.

That same day, a military conference was held at the Berghof. Goering, Brauchitsch, Raeder, and Dr. Todt were present, among others. Hitler tried to convince himself and his guests that Britain and France would not fight, although Germany might face a trade embargo. A few days after this conference, Major General Georg Thomas, the chief of the Economics and Armaments Branch of OKW, became the only member of the High Command to openly challenge Hitler's assumptions, stating that an attack on Poland would unleash a prolonged world war and concluding that Germany lacked the food or raw materials to fight it. The Fuehrer, however, rejected Thomas's conclusions. There would be no world war, he said, now that the Soviet Union had sided with Germany.

Meanwhile, events continued to build up toward a clash in Europe. On August 15, Hitler secretly cancelled the annual Nuremberg Party Rally, ironically dubbed the ''Party Rally of Peace.'' It was scheduled to begin the first week of September. Many of those who would have participated were secretly mobilized that day, when 250,000 men were called to active duty for service on the Western Front. Simultaneously,

mobilization plans were secretly given to the railroads; OKH made plans to move its headquarters to Zossen, east of Berlin; and the Navy reported that 21 submarines and its two pocket battleships, *Graf Spee* and *Deutschland*, were ready to sail.

Ambassador von der Schulenburg met with Molotov in Moscow at 8 P.M. on August 15, beginning a week and a half of fast and furious Soviet-German negotiations. On August 16, Germany dropped all pretense that it was not in a hurry to settle the Polish question. The Russians stalled, however, to wring the maximum possible concessions from the Germans. On August 21, they at last agreed to receive Ribbentrop in Moscow, for the purpose of signing a undenounceable 25-year nonagression pact.

The following day, Hitler assembled his top military commanders at the Obersalzburg, gave them a pep talk, and told them that he would probably order the attack on Poland to begin in four days (that is, on August 26—the 25th anniversary of the victory at Tannenberg and six days ahead of the original schedule). He then lectured the leaders on his own unique greatness and that of Mussolini. Because either could be eliminated at any time by a criminal or a lunatic, it was essential that they wage war before he grew much older. He did not think that the West would fight, but the risks had to be accepted. ''Our enemies are little worms,'' he said. ''I saw them at Munich.'' Just before they broke for lunch, Hitler added: ''I am only afraid that some *Schweinehund* will make a proposal for mediation.''[11]

In the afternoon session, Hitler admonished his generals to ''Close your hearts to pity. Act brutally.... The stronger man is right.... Be harsh and remorseless! Be steeled against all signs of compassion!'' He then dismissed them with the comment that further orders would be given later.

By concluding the non-aggression pact, the Germans ensured that the Soviet Union would maintain a policy of friendly neutrality while the Wehrmacht fell on Poland; there would be no two-front war. In the secret protocols, the German and Soviet spheres of influence in the Baltic States were delineated, with the northern frontier of Lithuania as the dividing line. Poland was to be divided along the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula, and San. Finally, Ribbentrop agreed to declare Germany's disinterest in Bessarabia, a part of Romania that Russia lost in 1919. This was a terrible blunder, as we shall see.

By 1 P.M. on August 24, a jubilant Ribbentrop was on his way back to Berlin. The 1935 Franco-Soviet agreement was now a write-off, and both he and Hitler believed that the British and French guarantees to Poland were also part of history.

They were both wrong. The British cabinet met at 3 P.M. on August 22 and issued a communique, stating that the Russo-German Pact in

no way affected its guarantee to Poland. By the next day, it was obvious to Berlin that the impact of the non-aggression pact on Anglo-French thought was less than expected. The policy of British alliance with the Soviet Union had always been the policy of Chamberlain's opponents—the Labor Party, Lloyd George, and others. The Conservative Party had always disliked the Soviets and, as Bullock wrote, there ''was considerable satisfaction [in Conservative circles] that the Russians had now 'shown themselves in their true colours'.''[12]

The unexpected British and French reaction, coupled with an Italian refusal to go to war before 1942, caused even Adolf Hitler to pause on the brick of war. His resolve was further shaken on the evening of August 26, when the British and Poles signed a formal treaty of mutual assistance in London. About 6:40 P.M., he called for Keitel and ordered that the invasion be delayed. At Nuremberg, the chief of OKW recalled, ''I was suddenly called to Hitler at the Chancellery and he said to me: 'Stop everything at once. Get Brauchitsch immediately. I need time for negotiations'.''[13]

It was almost too late. Some of the forward platoons did not receive the order until they had made contact with the Polish outposts and shooting took place in several sectors; however, since the Germans had been provoking incidents for days, the Polish General Staff was not certain what was really taking place and the German regiments silently pulled back from their final jump-off lines.

In the meantime, Hitler regained the composure he had lost the day before. He saw General Halder shortly after 3 P.M. on August 27 and set the date for the attack as September 1. This time he did not back down. Diplomatic maneuvering continued, but Hitler was unable to drive a wedge between the Western Allies and the Poles. Nevertheless, the bombs began to fall on Poland at 4:30 A.M. on September 1.

Hitler had his war.

NOTES

1. Alan J. Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (1964), p. 490 (hereafter cited as Bullock).
2. Sybil Bannister, *I Lived Under Hitler* (1957), p. 31.
3. *DGFP*, vol. 6, pp. 147–48.
4. Shirer, p. 466.
5. Hans Bernd Gisevius, *To the Bitter End*, Richard and Clara Winston, trans. (1947; reprint ed., 1975), p. 362 (hereafter cited as Gisevius).
6. *NCA*, vol. 6, pp. 916–28; *DGFP*, vol. 6, pp. 186–87, 223–28 (partial translation); IMT, vol. 34, pp. 380–422 (German original).
7. Seaton, *German Army*, pp. 88–90.
8. Galeazzo Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries, 1939–1943*, Hugh Gibson, ed. (1946).

9. *NCA*, vol. 7, pp. 847–54 (ND L-79); *DGFP*, vol. 6, pp.574–80; IMT, vol. 37, pp. 575–78 (German original). Karl Bodenschatz, who was born in 1890, served under Goering in World War I as a lieutenant in Richthofen's ''Flying Circus.'' He had been chief of the ministerial office in the Air Ministry and was promoted to general of fliers in 1941. He was seriously wounded in both legs during the Stauffenberg assassination attempt of July 20, 1944, and he apparently never returned to Fuehrer Headquarters. He died in 1979. Rudolf Absolom, comp., *Rangliste der Generale der deutschen Luftwaffe Nach dem Stand vom 20. April 1945* (1984), p. 23.

10. *DGFP*, vol. 6, pp. 575–78.

11. *NCA*, vol. 7, pp. 581–86 (ND 798-PS), pp. 665–66 (ND 1014-PS); *DGFP*, vol. 7, pp. 200–206; IMT, vol. 14, pp. 64–65. Also see IMT, vol. 41, pp. 18–25, for Admiral Boehm's notes.

12. Bullock, p. 527.

13. IMT, vol. 10, pp. 514–15.

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In the beginning. . . . The S.A. parades through the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin on the evening of January 30, 1933—the day Hitler became chancellor of Germany (Courtesy of Dr. Waldo Dalstead).

Hitler with General Hans von Seeckt, the founder of the Reichsheer and the commander-in-chief of the German Army, 1920–26. Seeckt was primarily responsible for laying the foundations for the Wehrmacht, which Hitler used to conquer most of Europe. Seeckt, whose wife was partially Jewish, played a major role in suppressing Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch of 1923. He opposed the Nazis until Hitler declared that his wife was an ''honorary Aryan.'' Seeckt then cooperated with the NSDAP. He died in 1936 (U.S. Military History Institute).

Storm Troopers (also called Brownshirts or S.A.) on military maneuvers, 1930s. The paramilitary Brownshirts were considered a great potential reservoir of semi-trained recruits by the armed forces, but they were also considered its greatest potential threat prior to 1935 (U.S. Military History Institute).

President Paul von Hindenburg and Chancellor Adolf Hitler, 1933. The old field marshal did not want to appoint Hitler chancellor and withheld the office from him for six months, despite the Nazi plurality in the Reichstag. Hindenburg finally succumbed to pressure and appointed the former corporal chancellor on January 30, 1933. When Hindenburg died the following year, Hitler combined their two offices and became Fuehrer (leader) of Germany (Courtesy of Dr. Waldo Dalstead).

Ernst Roehm, early Nazi, the commander of the Brownshirts and sometime Hitler ally, shown here shortly after his release from prison in 1924, after he took part in the Beer Hall Putsch, Hitler's ill-conceived attempt to seize control of the Bavarian government in 1923. A former army captain, Roehm had definite leadership skills, but his ambition to become a sort of supreme defense minister and to place himself above the army led to a crisis in 1934. After making a deal with Blomberg et al., Hitler solved the problem by having Roehm murdered (U.S. National Archives).

German Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, Hitler's minister of defense from 1933 to 1938, listened to a lecture from Italian Marshal Pietro Badoglio in Berlin, 1937. The pro-Nazi Blomberg later married a former prostitute and was forced to resign in disgrace in early February 1938. Badoglio helped depose Mussolini and briefly succeeded him as head of state of Italy from July 25 to September 8, 1943. He fled Rome that day but remained in charge of the rump Italian government until June 1944 (U.S. National Archives).

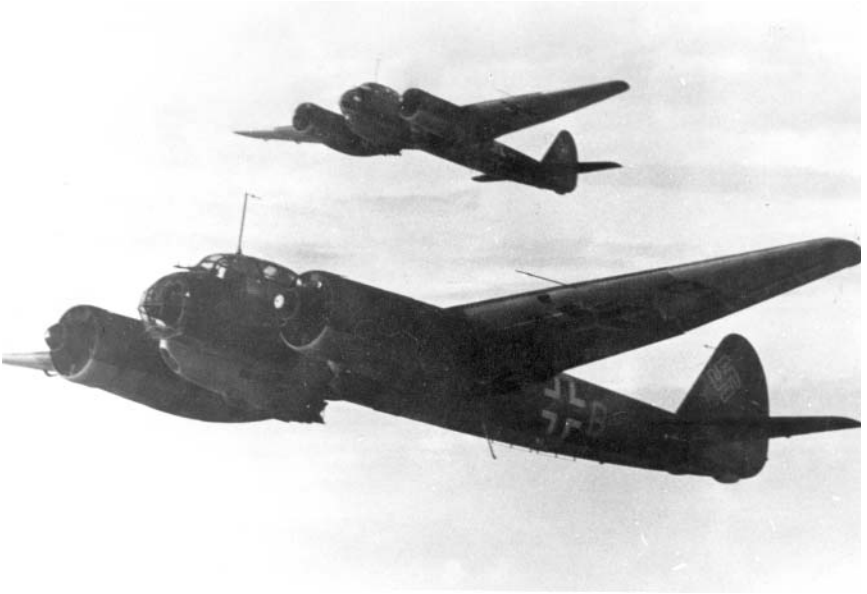
Hitler discusses military matters with Defense Minister Colonel General (later Field Marshal) Werner von Blomberg and General of Artillery Baron Werner von Fritsch, the commander-in-chief of the army. In early 1938, Blomberg was forced to retire in disgrace for marrying a former prostitute. Fritsch was dismissed on trumped-up charges of homosexuality (invented by Heinrich Himmler and his deputy, Reinhard Heydrich) at the same time (Courtesy of Dr. Waldo Dalstead).

Lieutenant General Walter Wever, the first chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe and the leading advocate of the four-engine strategic bomber. Had this brilliant young officer lived, it is quite conceivable that Germany might have won the Battle of Britain and World War II. Fortunately for the Allies, he was killed in an air accident on June 3, 1936 (Courtesy of John Angolia).

A German infantry unit parades through its garrison town, circa 1936. Scenes of this nature were common in the *Blumenkrieg* period of 1935–39, as Germans of all classes (including the anti-Nazis) genuinely welcomed rearmament and universal military conscription. People in many areas welcomed incorporation into the Third Reich (U.S. Military History Institute).

Not everyone welcomed the German Army and incorporation into the Third Reich. This Czech woman was ordered to participate in a pro-Nazi demonstration during the Wehrmacht's occupation of the Sudetenland, October 1938, but was unable to conceal her true feelings (U.S. National Archives).

Franz Halder (1884–1972), the chief of the General Staff of the Army (1938–42). Halder also opposed Hitler's war and was an on-again, off-again conspirator. Hitler had little respect for him and sacked him on September 24, 1942. Halder ended the war in a concentration camp. He had previously served as Artillery Commander VII (1933–35), commander of the 7th Infantry Division (1935–36), and chief of operations and deputy chief of the General Staff (1936–38). He was promoted to general of artillery on February 1, 1938, and to colonel general on July 19, 1940 (U.S. National Archives).



The Junkers Ju-88 bomber. Initially designed as a horizontal bomber, its speed and range were greatly reduced when Ernst Udet, the director of the technical and air armaments office, added the requirement that it be able to dive. Originally billed as the Wonder Bomber, its performance was very disappointing due to the design changes necessitated by the dive bombing requirements, and it became known in the squadrons as ''the flying barn door'' (U.S. National Archives).

Colonel General Walter von Reichenau and Luftwaffe Colonel General Eduard Milch, late 1939 or 1940. Both men were promoted to field marshal on July 19, 1940. Reichenau was a very unusual, brutal and independent-minded commander. He commanded the German spearhead in Poland and was the first German to cross the Vistula. He swam it. Later, in Russia, Reichenau became upset at the SS Einsatzgruppen (murder squads)—not because they were committing genocide, but because they were using too much ammunition in doing so. He recommended that they limit themselves to two bullets per Jew. Hitler twice recommended Reichenau for commander-in-chief of the army, in 1934 and 1938, but the senior army generals—led by Gerd von Rundstedt—could not hear of it. Reichenau commanded 10th Army in Poland, the 6th Army in Belgium, France and Russia, and Army Group South in Russia. He suffered a fatal heart attack in January 1942 (U.S. National Archives).

The Bull of Scapa Flow: Lieutenant Guenther Prien, the commander of *U-47*. Prien sank more than 30 Allied ships in his legendary career, including the British battleship *Royal Oak*. Born in Osterfeld, Prussian Saxony, in 1908, he went to sea at age 17 and survived the shipwreck of the *Hamburg* off the Irish coast. He joined the Navy in 1933 because he could not find employment during the Great Depression. He was killed in action (along with his entire crew) on March 7, 1941 (Courtesy of John Angolia).

A Ju-87 Stuka dive bomber over France, 1940. Due to its poor strategic development, the Luftwaffe was little more than flying artillery for the German Army in 1940, but it accomplished this task extremely well (U.S. National Archives).

CHAPTER XIV

MOBILIZATION AND DEPLOYMENT

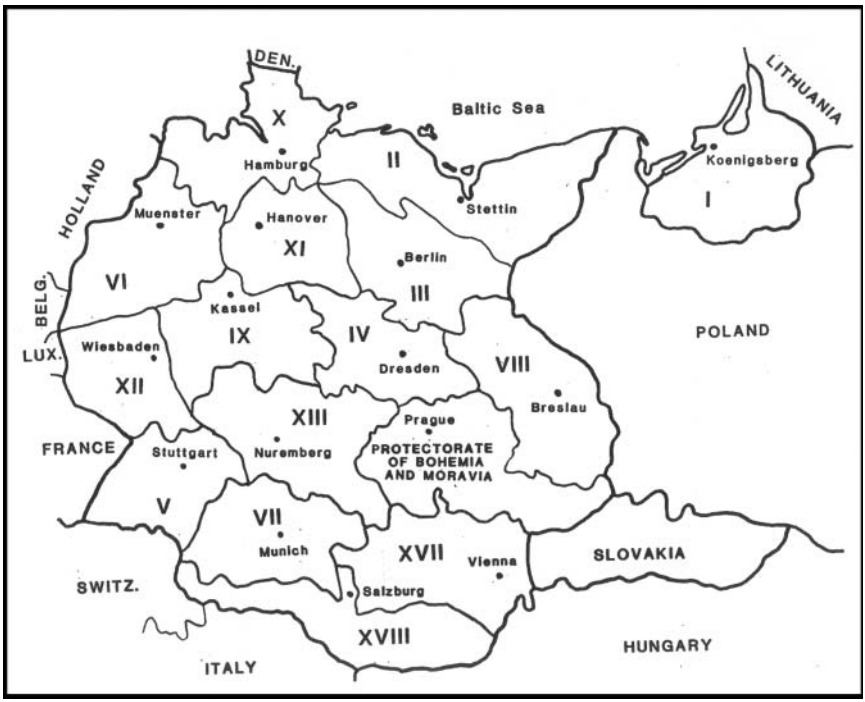
MOBILIZATION

The German Army's mobilization plan in 1939 was excellent. It had existed prior to the annexations of Austria, the Sudetenland, and Czechoslovakia, and was improved after each crisis. In autumn 1939, it was accomplished in four ''waves'' (separate call-ups), beginning on August 26, when mobilization was ordered.

Wave 1 involved the activation of higher headquarters and active duty divisions, numbered in the 1–50 block, and their supporting units. Activated headquarters included one army group (Army Group C) and 10 armies (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 8th, 10th, 12th, and 14th), formed from existing army groups, Wehrkreise, and corps headquarters. The deputy components of the Wehrkreise (initially consisting primarily of older reserve or Landwehr officers and retired officers who had been recalled to active duty) assumed territorial responsibility and attended to the procurement and training of replacements for units of the tactical corps and divisions, once the tactical commands left for the field. Figure 14.1 shows the Wehrkreise as they existed in 1939. The operational headquarters of OKH was set up at Zossen within six hours of the time the mobilization order was issued. Army Group C and the 10 army headquarters were operational by the second day of mobilization. The active corps headquarters and the panzer and light divisions, as well as the units assigned to support the infantry divisions, were mobilized by the second day. The remaining units assigned to support the active duty infantry divisions were operational by the third day of mobilization.[1]

Each active duty infantry division was composed of 78 percent active duty personnel, 12 percent Category I reservists, 6 percent Category II

Figure 14.1
The Wehrkreise, 1939



reservists, and 4 percent Landwehr personnel. The reservists and Landwehr were assigned almost exclusively to supply and support units.

Wave 2 included corps headquarters organized from the reserve and 16 fully trained reserve divisions in the 51–100 block. Most of the men in these units had completed their compulsory military training and were recalled to active duty. Wave 2 corps headquarters became operational on the third day of mobilization and Wave 2 divisions were operational and ready to move to the field by the fourth day of mobilization (August 29).

Wave 2 corps headquarters included Frontier Guard Commands Saarpfalz, Eifel, and Upper Rhine (*Oberrhein*). Their officers included active duty generals and officers who had already been partially trained for corps-level staff duties. Later (by mid-September 1939) some of them were augmented with their ''corps units'' (artillery commands, signals regiments, artillery and supply units, and others). These units were upgraded to corps commands (corps of limited offensive capabilities) or regular corps headquarters (*Armeekorps*) shortly thereafter.

Wave 3 consisted of 21 divisions in the 201–250 block. It included many men from the 1901–13 classes and World War I veterans who had had one or more short periods of refresher training. They were ready by the sixth day of mobilization, when they were engaged in the mission of securing rear areas. They could be committed to combat operations only in a restricted role and had little or no offensive combat value.

Fourteen Wave 4 divisions (in the 251–300 block) were formed from the training units within Germany. Their formation was complete by the sixth day of mobilization and were assigned to supplement Wave 3 divisions.[2] As of the seventh day of mobilization, a new headquarters, the Replacement Army (*Ersatzheer*, also known as the Home Army), was activated. It was responsible for the zone of the interior, permitting OKH to devote its full attention to the conduct of operations in the combat zone. It was commanded by General of Artillery Fritz Fromm, the former chief of the General Army Office at OKH.

In addition, activated units required large numbers of motorized vehicles, non-motorized vehicles (such as wagons), and horses. These were supplied by (or were appropriated from) other government agencies (such as the postal service and the civil police), party organizations (the Labor Service, Hitler Youth, and so on), business corporations, and private citizens.

In all, the regular German Army had 730,000 men, organized into 51 divisions: 35 infantry, four motorized, three mountain, four light, and five panzer divisions (the Wave 1 divisions). Upon mobilization, the army was reinforced with another 1.1 million men (reservists or Landwehr). Some of these were organized into the 51 Wave 2, 3, and 4 divisions, all of which were infantry. Most of these divisions were lacking in equipment and armament—many severely so. Quite a few lacked some of their component units. Some infantry regiments had no third battalions, and some artillery regiments were short their IV (heavy) battalions. Almost all units of this type were sent to the Western Front or kept in the zone of the interior, where they engaged in training.

The Hitler Youth, incidentally, was a great help in the mobilization. The week before the invasion began, its members delivered tens of thousands of call-up papers throughout Germany. Then, all physically able sixth formers (16 year olds) were drafted for service on the farms. For most of them, this signaled the end of the formal education forever, because farm service was followed by a term in the RAD and then by induction into the armed forces. This pattern continued throughout the war. By 1942, approximately 600,000 boys and 1.4 million girls from the HJ were working on the farms, freeing thousands of men for service in the Wehrmacht.[3] Others saw service as firemen, postmen, road workers, air raid rescue workers, police and railroad auxiliaries, and

couriers for the party or the Wehrkreise. Girls worked in state kindergartens, or served as clerks, telephone operators, typists, or nurses and Red Cross auxiliaries.

The officers of the German General Staff and *Panzerwaffe* seemed to delight in creating panzer and light divisions of varying composition to confuse the enemy, future historians, and sometimes themselves. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Panzer had one tank and one motorized infantry brigade each, but the panzer battalions of the 1st were smaller than those of the 2nd or 3rd, while the 4th Panzer had a tank brigade but only one regiment of motorized infantry. The 5th Panzer Division had a panzer brigade and two motorized infantry regiments, but no motorized infantry brigade headquarters. The 10th Panzer Division (formed in Prague on April 1, 1939) was supposed to have a tank brigade and a motorized infantry brigade, but it only had a motorized infantry regiment and a panzer regiment when the war broke out. There were, as yet, no 6th, 7th, 8th, or 9th Panzer Divisions. Table 14.1 shows the organization of the combat units of the panzer branch by division.

The 1st Panzer Division had an authorized strength of 270 tanks, while the other five divisions were supposed to have 306 tanks. The 1st Panzer had 56 PzKw Is, 78 PzKw IIs, 112 PzKw IIIs, and 24 Mark IVs. Since it was equipped with the best and most modern tanks, it was the most powerful of the panzer divisions. The other divisions were suppose to have 124 Mark Is, 138 Mark IIs, 20 Mark IIIs, and 24 Mark IVs. These figures could not be reached by the time war broke out—especially in the PzKw III category. All of the panzer divisions had an authorized strength of about 12,000 men, although the 10th Panzer did not reach this level until after the Polish campaign.

One major improvised armored formation was created for the Polish campaign: *Panzer Verbaende Kempf*, which was also known as Panzer Division Kempf. Like most ad hoc formations of this nature, it was named after its commander, in this case, Major General Werner Kempf. It was a mixed army and SS unit, and included Kempf's own Headquarters, 4th Panzer Brigade, which was transferred from Stuttgart to East Prussia, where it assumed control of the 7th Panzer Regiment, the ''Deutschland'' SS Motorized Infantry Regiment, the newly formed SS Artillery Regiment, and the SS Reconnaissance Battalion, as well as a few smaller army and SS units.[4]

The four light divisions (numbered 1st through 4th) also varied considerably in internal organization. Each, however, had a panzer battalion, equipped mainly with captured Czechoslovak P-35(t) and P-38(t) tanks, which were generally superior to the German Mark Is and IIs. In all, the German Army invaded Poland with 34 panzer battalions, which had a strength of 2,820 tanks: 928 PzKw Is, 1,231 PzKw IIs, 202 P-35(t)s, 98 P-38(t)s, 148 PzKw IIIs, and 213 PzKw IVs.[5]

Table 14.1
Panzer Formations in the Polish Campaign, 1939

Division	Panzer Brigade	Panzer Regiment	Panzer Battalion
1st Panzer	1	1, 2	
2nd Panzer	2	3, 4	
3rd Panzer	3	5, 6	
4th Panzer	5	35, 36	
5th Panzer	8	15, 31	
10th Panzer		8	
Panzer Div. Kempf[a]	4	7	
	6	11, 25	
1st Light			65
2nd Light			66
3rd Light			67
4th Light			33
Panzer Troop School		Panzer Lehr[b]	
Other		23[c]	

Notes:
[a]Panzer Division Kempf was a temporary, ad hoc formation, organized in East Prussia in August 1939. In addition to the units shown above, it controlled the SS Standarte (Regiment) Deutschland, an SS artillery regiment, an SS reconnaissance battalion, an antitank battalion, and an engineer company. It was dissolved after the Polish campaign.
[b]The Panzer Lehr Battalion at Wuersdorf was upgraded and expanded to a three-battalion regiment in the summer of 1939.
[c]The independent 23rd Panzer Regiment was in OKH Reserve in August 1939. It was later redesignated 25th Panzer Regiment and was assigned to the 2nd Light Division, which was in the process of reorganizing as the 7th Panzer Division.

THE PLAN

On April 3, 1939, OKW gave the three services the go-ahead to begin detailed planning. OKH organized two army group headquarters to control operations against Poland. Colonel General Fedor von Bock's Army Group 1, which was originally scheduled to become the 2nd Army upon mobilization, was chosen to form Army Group North. Working Staff Rundstedt evolved into Army Group South, with a staff composed largely of officers and men from VII Corps. At the same time, Colonel General Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb was recalled from his retirement in Bavaria to command Army Group C, which controlled all of the forces on the Western Front.

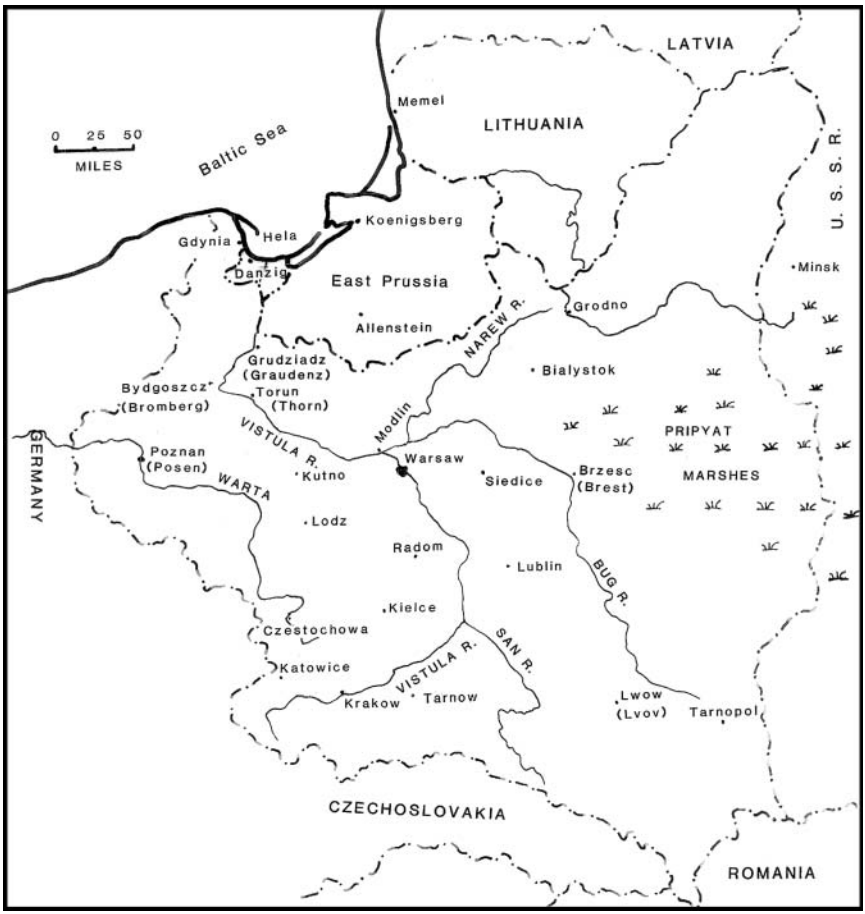
The main objective of the OKH plan (primarily drafted by Manstein) called for the destruction of the bulk of the Polish Army west of the Vistula. Its secondary objective was to capture Warsaw.

On the northern sector, the 4th Army (attacking eastward out of Pomerania) would cut the Polish Corridor at its base and take Grudziadz (Graudenz), linking up with elements of the 3rd Army, advancing out of East Prussia. The establishment of contact between the Reich proper and East Prussia would be followed by an all-out 3rd Army attack from Prussia toward Warsaw. In the southern zone, Army Group South (8th, 10th, and 14th Armies) would advance on Warsaw on a broad front, after diverting sufficient forces to hold off any Polish attack on its right flank from Galicia and the southeast. Army Group North would be supported by Kesselring's 1st Air Fleet, while Loehr's 4th Air Fleet supported Rundstedt's forces. The Free City of Danzig was to be taken by local forces, organized by the party, the SA, and army officers, who were secretly smuggled into the city. These forces, collectively known as Brigade Eberhardt, were under the command of Major General Friedrich-Georg Eberhardt, the former commander of the 44th Infantry Regiment. It included the 1st and 2nd Danziger Infantry Regiments (formerly the 1st and 2nd Landespolizei Regiments), an artillery battalion, and several miscellaneous companies. Hitler was briefed on the army's plan on April 26 and 27 and approved the OKH concept of operations. Figure 14.2 shows Poland as it existed in 1939.

In total, Army Group South had 21 infantry, four panzer, two motorized, four light, and three mountain divisions. Of these, six infantry and all three mountain divisions started the war in army group reserve. In all, Army Group South commanded 886,000 men, with 180,000 in 8th Army, 300,000 in 10th Army, 210,000 in 14th Army, and 196,000 in reserve. Army Group North had 630,000 men: 320,000 in 3rd Army, 230,000 in 4th Army, and 80,000 in reserve. A total of 1,516,000 men thus stood ready to invade Poland on August 31, 1939: the last day of peace in Europe. Table 14.2 shows the detailed Order of Battle or the German Army on that date.

Hitler's plans for the invasion of Poland did not encounter opposition from the senior generals. ''Hitler's army fell upon the hated Poles with well-documented relish,'' David Irving wrote later.[6] When Schacht suggested that he would like to speak with Brauchitsch about the illegality of the act, the commander-in-chief of the army declared that he would have the former minister of economics arrested if he dared set foot in Army Headquarters. On this occasion, this attitude was considerably more than an indication of the timidity of Brauchitsch regarding the Nazis—it reflected the nearly unanimous opinion of the German Officers' Corps. The only general on active duty to firmly go on record as opposing the invasion was Georg Thomas, and his opposition was based on geopolitical and economic, rather than moral, considerations. (General Beck opposed the war on moral grounds, but he was in retirement.) Admiral Canaris and Captain Karl Doenitz, the U-boat chief,

Figure 14.2
Poland, 1939



also opposed the war, but for strictly military reasons. Even such brilliant, non-Nazi officers as Erwin Rommel and Erich von Manstein were strongly in favor of settling accounts with Warsaw.

POLAND AND ITS ARMED FORCES[7]

In 1939, Poland was a poor and virtually indefensible country that lacked defensible frontiers. Only along the southern frontier (that is, in the zone of List's 14th Army), where the Carpathians reached peaks of up to 8,700 feet, did Poland have easily defensible terrain. The rest of the country was flat to gently undulating—perfect for armored and

Table 14.2
German Army Order of Battle, September 1, 1939[a]

EASTERN FRONT:
ARMY GROUP NORTH: Colonel General Fedor von Bock
- 4th Army: General of Artillery Guenther von Kluge
  - I Frontier Command: 207
  - XIX Motorized: 2 Motorized, 3 Panzer, 20 Motorized
  - II: 32, 3
  - III: Netze Brigade, 50
  - Army Reserve: 218, 23
- 3rd Army: General of Artillery Georg von Kuechler
  - XXI: 228, 21
  - I: Panzer Division Kempf, 11, 61
  - Wodrig: 1, 12
  - 1st Cavalry Brigade
  - Corps Brand: Loetzen and Goldap Brigades
  - Army Reserve: 217, Eberhard Brigade, XI Frontier Guard Command
- Army Group Reserve: 73, 10 Panzer, 206, 208

ARMY GROUP SOUTH: Colonel General Gerd von Rundstedt
- 8th Army: General of Infantry Johannes Blaskowitz
  - X: 24, 30
  - XIII: 10, 17
- 10th Army: General of Artillery Walter Reichenau
  - XI: 18, 19
  - XVI: 4 Panzer, 1 Panzer, 14, 31
  - IV: 46, 4
  - XV: 2 Light
  - Army Reserve:
    - XIV: 13 Motorized, 29 Motorized
    - 3 Light
    - 1 Light
- 14th Army: Colonel General Wilhelm List
  - VIII: 8, 28, 5 Panzer
  - XVII: 44, 45, 7
  - XVIII: 2 Panzer, 4 Light, 3 Mountain
  - Army Reserve:
    - XXII: 1 Mountain, 2 Mountain
- Army Group Reserves:
  - VII: 27
  - 62, 68, 213, 221, 239

WESTERN FRONT:
Army Group C: Colonel General Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb[b]
- 7th Army: General of Artillery Friedrich Dollmann
  - Oberrhein[c]: 260, 14 Landwehr, 5, 35
  - Army Reserves: 215, 78, 212
- 1st Army: General of Infantry Erwin von Witzleben
  - IX: 33, 25, 71

Table 14.2 (*continued*)

Saarpfalz: 9, 36, 6
XII: 52, 15, 34, 79
Army Reserves: 75, 214, 223, 246, 209, 231, 268
5th Army: General of Artillery Kurt Liebmann
Eifel: 86, 26, 227
VI: 16, 69, 211, 216
Army Reserves: 58, 87, 268

Notes:
[a]All units with Roman numerals are corps unless otherwise indicated. All units expressed in Arabic numerals are infantry divisions unless otherwise indicated.
[b]The dispositions of Army Group C are as of September 9.
[c]Frontier Guard Command Oberrhein was upgraded to XXV Corps and Frontier Guard Command Saarpfalz became the XXIV Corps on September 17, 1939. Frontier Guard Command Eifel became XXIII Corps the following day. The 14th Landwehr Division was upgraded to 205th Infantry Division on January 1, 1940.
Sources:
Georg Tessin, *Verbaende und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg, 1939–1945* (1973–81), Volume 2, pp. 1–2, 281; Volume 3, pp. 49–50; Volume 14, pp. 65–66; Robert M. Kennedy, *German Campaign in Poland* (1956), p. 74.

motorized operations. The weather in the autumn of 1939 was hot and dry: also perfect for fast-moving panzer operations.

The Polish decision to fight was predicated on several factors, including the traditional Slavic resentment of German eastward expansion, an overreliance on Polish cavalry and infantry, and an overreliance on assistance promised by Britain and France. Its peacetime army had an establishment of 28 understrength infantry divisions, two mountain divisions and several small mountain brigades, 14 horse cavalry brigades, one mechanized cavalry brigade, and two air divisions. A number of separate engineer, artillery, and other supporting units existed, but most of these had a training, rather than a tactical, mission.

All of these non-motorized units suffered from serious shortages in almost every material category, including machine guns, anti-tank guns, artillery, anti-aircraft guns, transport, and signal equipment. Its air force—which did not exist as a separate service—had only 935 aircraft, including 350 reconnaissance, 300 fighter, 150 fighter-bombers, and 135 liaison aircraft. Most of the Polish airplanes were obsolete and suitable for training purposes only. The total strength of all Polish air units was only 6,300 men.[8]

In total, the Polish active army had a strength of only 204,600 conscripts and volunteers, of which 16,300 were active duty officers. Junior officers had uniform training, but senior officers had served in the German, Austro-Hungarian, Hungarian, Russian, and other armies. Their

background was diverse. Overall, the Polish officer was considered in no way to be the professional equal of his German counterpart, especially at the field and general officer levels.

According to the Polish mobilization plan, the active duty forces were to be reinforced by 1.5 million first-class reservists (ages 24 to 42), plus 560,000 older reservists. They were to bring the 30 active duty divisions up to strength and form 15 reserve divisions, but this never happened, because the Polish mobilization began too late and was completely disrupted by the Luftwaffe.

The average Polish soldier was considered good and was certainly courageous, but lacked modern equipment and had only limited technical training. The troops were well disciplined and trained for the attack and were easily inspired to enthusiasm (similar to the French), but at the same time, they were subject to depression (also like the French). Unlike the French, however, they had no major line of fortifications facing the Germans.

Given its topography, its hopeless geopolitical position, its small military-industrial complex, and its obsolete equipment, Poland had no chance of defeating the Wehrmacht. It did, however, have a chance to survive as a nation-state under optimum conditions. To accomplish this, the Polish Army would have to fall back to the Vistula River and hold the Germans in check until the winter rains came in October. This would bog down the German tanks and motor vehicles and give Poland's allies a chance to come to her aid by indirect means. Granted, this was a slim hope, but it was the only one Warsaw had in 1939. This only chance, however, was negated by the lateness of the Polish mobilization and the fact the Poles tried to defend their entire 1,750-mile frontier with Germany, thus violating Frederick the Great's famous maxim: ''He who defends everything defends nothing.''

Poland delayed the full mobilization of army reserves until August 30, out of a fear of setting off a war. Three hours later, because of pressure from the French, this mobilization was cancelled. The next day, however, mobilization was proclaimed again. Naturally, these contradictory orders caused a great deal of confusion, especially in a country known for its poor communications facilities. Because of the lateness of the Polish mobilization, General Halder, the chief of the German General Staff, was confident of victory even before the first shot was fired. Table 14.3 shows the Polish Order of Battle on September 1, 1939, including units in the process of mobilizing.

As we have read, the peacetime Polish Army had made the critical mistakes of not establishing a separate air force or setting up air signal units. Consequently, the air units that were sent to tactical airfields (and that included most of the Polish combat aircraft) had no way to communicate with higher headquarters, because these dirt fields were

Table 14.3
Polish Army Order of Battle, September 1, 1939

HIGH COMMAND: Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly
Group Narev:
- 18th Infantry Division
- 33rd Infantry Division
- Podlaska Cavalry Brigade
- Suwalska Cavalry Brigade

Modlin Army:
- 8th Infantry Division
- 20th Infantry Division
- Nowogrodzka Cavalry Brigade
- Mazowiecka Cavalry Brigade

Group Wyszkow:
- 1st Infantry Division
- 41st Infantry Division
- 35th Infantry Division[a]

Seacoast Defense Command:
- Morska (Naval) National Guard Brigade
- 1st Naval Rifle Regiment
- 2nd Naval Rifle Regiment

Pomorze Army:
- 4th Infantry Division
- 9th Infantry Division
- 15th Infantry Division
- 16th Infantry Division
- 27th Infantry Division
- Pomorska Cavalry Brigade

Poznan Army:
- 14th Infantry Division
- 17th Infantry Division
- 25th Infantry Division
- 26th Infantry Division
- Wielkopolska Cavalry Brigade
- Podolska Cavalry Brigade

Group Kutno[a]:
- 5th Infantry Division
- 24th Infantry Division

Lodz Army:
- 2nd Infantry Division
- 10th Infantry Division
- 22nd Mountain Division
- 28th Infantry Division
- 30th Infantry Division
- Kresowa Cavalry Brigade
- Wolynska Cavalry Brigade

Table 14.3 (*continued*)

Krakow Army:
6th Infantry Division
7th Infantry Division
11th Infantry Division[a]
21st Mountain Division
23rd Infantry Division
45th Infantry Division
53rd Infantry Division
1st Mountain Brigade
10th Mechanized Brigade
Krakowska Cavalry Brigade
Prusy Army:
3rd Infantry Division
12th Infantry Division
13th Infantry Division
19th Infantry Division
29th Infantry Division
36th Infantry Division
39th Infantry Division[a]
44th Infantry Division[a]
Wilenska Cavalry Brigade
Carpathian Army:
2nd Mountain Brigade
3rd Mountain Brigade
Karpathy National Guard Brigade
Group Tarnow (Southern Reserve)[a]:
22nd Infantry Division[a]
38th Infantry Division[a]

Note:
[a]Unable to mobilize.

not equipped with radios—or even with telephones. As a result, except in the Warsaw sector, they were never able to concentrate against the Luftwaffe, which won the air battle over Poland almost by default.

NOTES

1. Burkhart Mueller-Hillebrant, *Das Heer* (1954-69), vol. 1, p. 70 (hereafter cited as Mueller-Hillebrant, *Das Heer*).

2. Robert M. Kennedy, ''The German Campaign in Poland,'' U.S. Department of the Army Pamphlet 20-255 (1956), pp. 26–27 (hereafter cited as Kennedy, ''Poland'').

3. Craig W. H. Luther, *Blood and Honor: The History of the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitler Youth, 1943–1945* (1987), p. 20 (hereafter cited as Luther).

4. Addington, p. 228.

5. Werner Haupt, *Das Buch der Panzertruppe, 1916–1945* (1989), p. 47 (hereafter cited as Haupt, *Panzertruppe*).

6. David Irving, *Hitler's War* (1977), vol. 1, p. 8.

7. The best English-language accounts of the Polish campaign are Kennedy, ''Poland,'' and Nicholas W. Bethell, *The War Hitler Won* (1972). For the best account of the air war, see Speidel, ''Poland.'' For the best account from the Polish point of view, see Steven Zaloga and Victor Madej, *The Polish Campaign, 1939* (1985) (hereafter cited as Zaloga and Madej).

8. The Polish Army also had several support and general headquarters (GHQ) units distributed throughout its 10 corps areas. These included 10 medium artillery regiments and 13 separate tank battalions.

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CHAPTER XV

FIRST BLOOD: POLAND, 1939

World War II in Europe started at 4:30 A.M. on the morning of September 1, 1939, when three German dive-bombers tried unsuccessfully to destroy a Polish engineer station, to prevent them from blowing up the Vistula River Bridge at Dirschau. About 10 minutes later, the obsolete battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* blasted the small Polish fortress of Westerplatte in Danzig harbor at a range of only a few hundred yards, while German airplanes attacked the coastal gun batteries, sank several small auxiliary ships, and wiped out the small Polish naval air squadron at Puck. At the same time, other aviation units and light German naval vessels sank a Polish destroyer in Gdynia harbor, and in Danzig, the SS Heimwehr Danzig, supported by a naval assault company, overran the post office and killed most of the Polish postal workers, who attempted to resist them. Most of the Poles were shot after they surrendered—the first of several atrocities committed by both sides over the next few weeks. By the end of the morning, Danzig was in German hands, and the Polish coast was under a tight blockade, although the efforts of Brigade Eberhard to storm the Westerplatte were beaten back by the small but determined Polish garrison.

The regular German infantry jumped off all along the line at 4:45 A.M. and experienced the usual problems of troops going into combat for the first time; there were cases of confusion at the jump-off points and incidents of tanks, artillery, and airplanes firing on friendly forces. Kuechler's 3rd Army struck in two directions: I Corps and Corps Wodrig advanced due south, toward Warsaw, while Falkenhorst's XXI Corps advanced southwest, toward its scheduled link-up with 4th Army at Grudziadz. Both prongs of the attack made good progress in the morning, but that afternoon, the I Corps attack ran into Polish field

fortifications at Mlawa, where all of the German assaults were beaten back with heavy losses, and several light panzers were destroyed.

Meanwhile, Guenther von Kluge's 4th Army tried to cut the Polish Corridor. Due to bad weather, it received little of the Luftwaffe support it had been planning on, and the fog and heavy mist compounded the confusion of troops in combat for the first time. General Guderian, for example, was well forward with the spearhead of the 3rd Panzer Division, when German artillery opened up on his column. One shell from a heavy gun landed 50 yards in front of his command vehicle and another exploded 50 yards behind it. Fearing that the next one was likely to be a direct hit, Guderian ordered his driver to get them out of there. The young man, however, became excited and drove straight into a ditch at full speed, breaking the front axle and smashing the vehicle. The ''Father of the Blitzkrieg'' nevertheless managed to make his way back to his CP without being killed by his driver or his own gunners.[1]

On the larger battlefield, however, the Germans were more successful. General von Kluge had deceived the Poles by attacking through the Tuchola Forest with six divisions (including Guderian's XIX Motorized Corps). The Polish Pomorze Army had not expected the Germans to try to push strong armored and motorized forces through this area and had covered it with only one infantry division, the 9th, which had a defensive frontage of 45 miles. As a general rule during World War II, one division could reasonably be expected to hold a frontage of only six miles against a determined attack. The decisive moment in the battle occurred when Baron Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg's 3rd Panzer Division found a weak spot in the Polish line, which was covered by a single bicycle company. The bicyclists were quickly annihilated, and the 3rd Panzer pushed on to the Brda (Brahe) River, which it crossed unopposed that afternoon—unknown to the Poles.

In the meantime, the Pomorska Cavalry Brigade came up on the northern flank of the disintegrating 9th Polish Infantry Division and engaged the 20th Motorized Division. It was here that an incident took place that has, more than any other, shaped the popular conception of the Polish campaign. There are, however, two diametrically opposing versions of what actually took place. By late afternoon, according to the German version, brave but foolhardy Polish horsemen deliberately attacked a German tank column with lances and swords. Naturally, they suffered horrendous casualties in a hopeless and foolhardy cavalry charge. The Polish version, however, sounds more plausible.

According to this account, the Pomorska Cavalry Brigade was withdrawing in good order, covered by two squadrons of Colonel Kazimlerz Mastelarz's 18th Lancer Regiment. As night was falling, Colonel Mastelarz spotted a German infantry unit in a forest clearing and ordered a saber charge against it. He quickly overran the infantry, only

to run into an ambush himself, because in the failing light he had not seen that several German armored cars lay along the forest line in front of him. They opened up on the Poles with heavy machine guns and small cannons. Naturally, the Polish cavalry quickly disengaged but not before quite a few horses and riders went down. Colonel Mastelarz was among the dead.

The next day, several Italian war correspondents were brought to the scene and were told that the Polish horsemen had been killed while deliberately charging tanks. The tale caught the fancy of the world's media and has been told and embellished ever since, to a point at which the Polish cavalry has been made to look like complete idiots—which they would have been, had they made charging panzers with lance a standard practice, as the German propaganda ministry led the world to believe. Isolated incidents of this kind did occur in the heat and confusion of battle, but they were very rare.

It is incredible how many of Goebbels' lies and half-truths are still accepted as fact, even more than a half a century later.

By the end of September 1, the forward elements of Army Group South had advanced five miles into Poland and some of the German vanguards had advanced 15 miles, despite Polish demolitions. In the north, the 3rd Panzer Division was threatening to cut off most of the Pomorze Army in the Corridor, where the Polish situation was critical. Only the Luftwaffe had a bad morning. Weather conditions throughout Poland and eastern Germany had been worse than predicted, especially in the north. Even at Warsaw the ceiling was only 600 feet, and visibility was only 3,000 feet. The German plans for a synchronized takeoff of all operational air units was a total failure; only 7 of the 20 attack groups of Kesselring's air fleet could even take off before noon on September 1. Instead of the massive, all-out blow the Luftwaffe had planned to mount, the German air offensive degenerated into a series of individual actions. The 1st Air Fleet (which had most of the German bomb carriers when the invasion began) could bring only five airfields under attack on the first day of the invasion, and only one (Warsaw-Okecie) had sizable Polish air contingents present. Reconnaissance aircraft found that 15 Polish airfields had been deserted.

The weather was better in southern Poland, where only three bomber groups were grounded in the morning. Eight other bomber groups of the 2nd Air Division flew a total of 21 group-size missions and dropped 250 tons of bombs on Polish targets. Several groups flew multiple missions. Unlike 1st Air Fleet, Loehr's 4th consisted of a unit designed to fly strategic missions (the 2nd Air Division) and another designed to fly tactical support missions (Richthofen's Special Purpose Air Command). The 2nd Air delivered its main attacks against the Polish airfields, and the major base at Krakow was carpet-bombed from

12,000 feet by 60 He-111s and then was attacked by more than 30 Stukas. About 30 Polish airplanes were destroyed, but they were either trainers or inoperable airplanes: all of the first-line aircraft had departed to their tactical bases the day before.

The problem (from the Polish point of view) was that they had failed to form enough air signal units and were now unable to communicate with their aviation units. By sending their airplanes to these small dirt fields—which did not even have telephones—the Polish High Command had lost control of them, and they were never able to regain it.

By afternoon, the fog evaporated, and the Luftwaffe began to pound ''targets of opportunity'' in the Polish rear. Richthofen's Special Purpose Air Command, which had three dive-bomber groups and one ground attack group (352 airplanes), flew 13 group-size missions and dropped an incredible total of 139 tons of bombs on its assigned targets, most of which were Polish ground units. General Speidel recalled:

> Entire Polish units disintegrated, the troops fleeing in wild disorder from the burning settlements, only to come under repeated air attack in their wild eastward flight. The impression of the first day of combat thus revealed clearly that the new close support air arm had supported the army's advance decisively and in numerous cases had made the advance possible at all.[2]

The Special Purpose Air Command lost only one aircraft missing, 16 damaged by Polish defensive fire, and 14 forced landings. Almost all of the forced landings were Me-110 twin-engine fighters, whose pilots had completely lost their way on their first combat missions and had run out of gas. One of the forced landings, however, was General Baron von Richthofen. The nephew of the Red Baron had become impatient and, tiring of pacing up and down and chain-smoking cigarettes, hopped into a reconnaissance plane and flew to the front, to see what was happening for himself. He flew a little too close to one Pole, who pumped several bullets into his gas tank. The general only narrow made it back to a German landing strip before he ran out of fuel.

Elements of Wilhelm Wimmer's 2nd Air Division flew tactical missions against targets of opportunity as well. About 1 P.M. that afternoon, a German reconnaissance pilot spotted the two-mile long dust trail of a Polish cavalry brigade, moving westward toward the village of Wielum, 12 miles from the German border, with the obvious intention of launching a counterattack. Soon, the Stukas of the II/LG 2 were dive-bombing the cavalrymen from an altitude of 2,500 feet, followed by a flight of 30 Do-17 bombers from KG 77, which completed the destruction. The cavalry brigade was totally shattered, its 3,000 men were either dead or completely disorganized.

The Luftwaffe generals were surprised by the lack of activity on the part of the Polish air forces, especially their bomber units, which did not put in a major appearance all day. The reports from the 1st and 4th Air Fleets noted that Polish fighters had been encountered and accepted battle in all sectors, but their efforts had been scattered. They concluded ''with certainty'' that the Polish air forces would make a major appearance somewhere the following day.[3]

It is obvious from reading their reports that the Luftwaffe General Staff officers did not appreciate the disruptive effects that scattering the Polish air units to their isolated tactical bases had on their ability to concentrate—especially in view of the fact that the senior Polish commanders could not communicate with them, due to their lack of signal and air signal units. The Luftwaffe had, in fact, succeeded in establishing complete air supremacy over all of Poland, except over the capital city, where they were only capable of establishing local air superiority. They had won a decisive victory, even though they did not know it yet.

The German advance resumed at dawn on September 2. In the northern section, a 3rd Army engineer task force reached Dirschau (Tczew), only to find the vital bridge across the Vistula had been destroyed by the Poles. The engineers who had blown the bridge were promptly shot. Elsewhere in the 3rd Army's zone, XXI Corps beat back heavy Polish counterattacks and continued its advance on Grudziadz. By the end of the day, it was closing in on the city from the north and east and was preparing to make a final assault the next day.

Meanwhile, Corps Wodrig finally broke through Polish lines east of Mwala and began to advance south. Late that afternoon, General von Kuechler shifted Panzer Division Kempf to the east and General Wodrig ordered it to envelope the right flank of the Mlawa position, which would force the Poles to either abandon the fortifications or face encirclement. Polish resistance continued to be fierce, but the battle began to go against them the next day, and they abandoned Mlawa during the night of September 3–4, as the Modlin Army began a general retreat toward Warsaw, constantly harassed by the Luftwaffe.

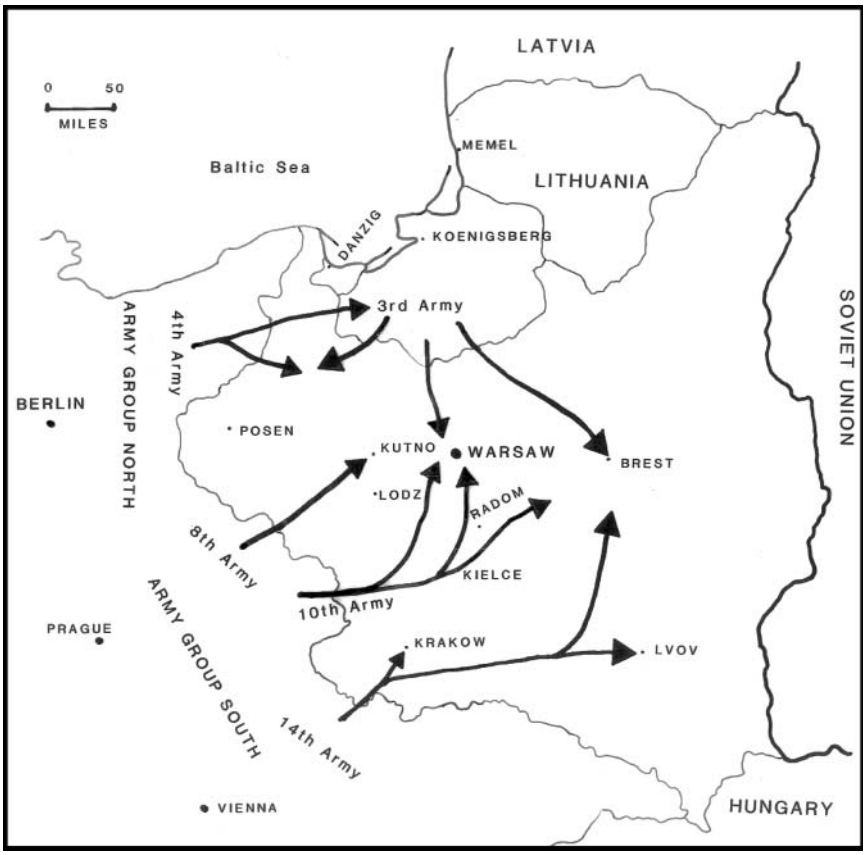
The most important battle of the day took place in the zone of the German 4th Army. Here, Geyr von Schweppenburg's 3rd Panzer Division exploited its breakthrough of the day before and, by the following morning, had cut off most of the Pomorze Army. Two infantry divisions and the Pomorska Cavalry Brigade were surrounded near Franciszkowo, where they were destroyed on September 4.

Meanwhile, on September 2, it became obvious to General von Bock that the Poles were trying to evacuate the northern corridor. Accordingly, on September 3, he committed his main army group reserve, Major General Ferdinand Schaal's 10th Panzer Division, to a thrust

across the corridor. Schaal met little resistance and established contact with the 3rd Army at Nowe Swiecie (Neuenburg) that evening. To the north, General Leonhard von Kaupisch's I Frontier Command was given the task of reducing the Polish Seacoast Defense Force, which was now completely surrounded. In the meantime, Falkenhorst's XXI Corps took Grudziadz, setting up another junction between the 3rd and 4th Armies, this one at the base of the corridor.

The first phase of the campaign in the north ended with the linking of the 3rd and 4th Armies (see Figure 15.1). German losses had been low: Guderian's corps, for example, lost only 150 killed and 700 wounded. Losses among junior officers, however, had been higher, because they led from the front and were particularly aggressive in

Figure 15.1
The Invasion of Poland, 1939



Poland. Among the prominent men who lost sons in this battle were General Adam, State Secretary von Weizsaecker, and Colonel Baron Hans von Funck, the future panzer corps commander. Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb's son was killed shortly thereafter. Meanwhile, the Pomorze Army (or what was left of it) was in full retreat, and the Germans had already captured 15,000 of its men, 90 field pieces, and large amounts of supplies and material. The Modlin Army was also falling back rapidly and had lost 10,000 men captured. General von Bock now began to shift the bulk of his armor and motorized forces eastward, across East Prussia to take the Poles in the right flank and prevent their escape in the marshy terrain of eastern Poland. Since the air belonged to the Luftwaffe, the Poles were unaware that this move was taking place and would in no way be prepared for the main blow.

On September 2, the Luftwaffe concentrated on counterair operations in the morning, but still did not find the Polish air forces in any strength. Since the Polish air unit could not be located, the German pilots increasingly shifted their attention to attacks against Polish railroads, mobilization sites, and ground forces, including vehicle columns, troop concentrations, marching troops, units in retreat, and fortified positions. Loerzer's 2nd Air Division also began committing sizable units to attacks against rail depots, rail junctions, trains, ammunition factories, bridges, radio stations, and even road junctions. Twin-engine fighter units also engaged in attacking trains and Polish ground targets, because they were no longer needed to escort bombers. ''On the evening of the second day of the campaign,'' General Speidel wrote, ''it could be assumed with safety that the Polish air forces no longer represented an important factor in the Polish conduct of operations, although nothing definite had been established as to the whereabouts of these forces.''[4]

The Poles had been given only one uninterrupted day to implement their mobilization plan, and one and a half days during which the Luftwaffe offered only limited interference. The Polish plan was based on the assumption that they would have two weeks to mobilize. From the afternoon of September 2 on, however, the German aviators completely disrupted their efforts, smashed their communications, and nearly neutralized their chain of command. The Poles, therefore, were never able to put more than half of their forces in the field in an organized fashion, and many ground units were overrun before they could complete their assembly. Due to the lateness of the their mobilization, the Poles had lost the war before the first shot was fired.

Meanwhile, in Polish Silesia, Rundstedt's Army Group South continued its drive on Warsaw, spearheaded by Reichenau's 10th Army. To its north, Blaskowitz's 8th Army advanced on the important city of Lodz and covered Reichenau's left flank, while List's 14th Army on the

right drove toward the industrial region around Krakow and into Galacia. Rundstedt's forward elements advanced as much as 15 miles on September 1, as most of the Polish units conducted a deliberate retreat in almost every sector. This pattern, plus evidence of increasing Polish demolitions and other obstacles, convinced von Rundstedt that the Poles intended to establish a defensive line along the Warta River. Accordingly, he ordered his army commanders to breach this line as rapidly as possible.

September 3 was a decisive day in the battle on the southern front. Czestochowa was taken before noon by Lieutenant General Rudolf Schmidt's 1st Panzer Division, which rushed across the Wartha and encircled the 7th Polish Infantry Division at Lelow. The Poles had been so heavily bombed and strafed by the Luftwaffe that their morale broke, and they surrendered in droves. Elsewhere in the 10th Army's zone, German panzer and motorized units bypassed centers of Polish resistance and left them for the infantry, and German troops seized several bridgeheads across the Warta, despite locally desperate Polish resistance. In most sectors, however, Polish resistance was weakening, and their withdrawals became more and more hasty. The advance was even easier in the zone of the 14th Army. After leading his 3rd Panzer Regiment through the heavily wooded Carpathians, Ritter von Thoma burst into a Polish village, where he found the people on their way to church. ''How astonished they were to see my tanks approaching!'' he recalled. ''I had turned the enemy's defenses without losing a single tank.''[5] By the morning of September 4, Army Group South estimated that the Poznan Army was incapable of launching a heavy counterattack on the exposed flank of the army, and the panzers surged forward in full pursuit. The 1st and 4th Panzer Divisions completely broke through the Lodz Army and engaged the main Polish reserves—Stefan Dab-Biernacki's Prusy Army—which concentrated around Piotkow and was now all that stood between them and Warsaw. Polish plans called for him to have eight infantry divisions, a cavalry brigade, and a tank brigade; however, due to the rapid German advance and the disrupted Polish mobilization, he had only three infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade. By the evening of September 5, the Prusy Army was also smashed and only the Poznan Army had not been shattered or seriously damaged by the Germans. As a result, Marshal Rydz-Smigly ordered the Prusy, Krakow, Lodz, and Poznan Armies to begin withdrawing to defensive positions east of the Vistula and behind the Dunajec River. This order came two days too late.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE POLISH ARMY

By the sixth day of the campaign, the Poles were in full retreat all along the front. Most of the Pomorze Army had been mopped in the

corridor, and the Seacoast Defense Force was hopelessly cut off in the Baltic sector. On September 5, the Modlin Army's retreat reached the garrison town on Modlin, less than 25 miles northwest of Warsaw. It attempted to make a stand along the Narew River, but the 3rd Army was in close pursuit, and by the end of the day, the Poles had been totally routed, and Kempf's panzers were across the Narew. At the same time, to the south, Major General Dr. Ritter Alfred von Hubicki's 4th Light Division had succeeded in driving a wedge between the Krakow Army and the Karpaty Army and was threatening to capture Tarnow and isolate the Karpaty units between the Vistula and San Rivers.

Meanwhile, the German breakthrough at Piotrkow posed a threat to both the capital and the main Vistula line. On the evening of September 7, Rydz-Smigly ordered the High Command to withdraw from Warsaw to Brzesc, on the assumption that the Germans would surround and isolate the capital within the next week. This decision was a bad one, because Polish communications network had not functioned well, even though it had been set up before the war. To expect it to disassemble, re-net, and establish a good communications system in the isolated and unprepared small city of Brzesc, about 100 miles to the east, was asking too much of it. From this point on, Polish action was totally uncoordinated. In fact, for the next week, the focus of the battle revolved around the uncoordinated attempts of the Polish forces to escape behind the Vistula (or the San River in the southern sector), while the Wehrmacht attempted to destroy them before they could withdraw.

In the case of the Krakow Army, it was wishful thinking to believe it could escape List's 14th Army. On September 8, the Lodz Army abandoned the city of Lodz, and the Prusy Army gave up Radom. Many of the slow Polish units, with their horse-drawn transport, were bypassed by the rapidly moving German motorized spearheads; they were pounded by the Luftwaffe and mopped up piecemeal by the pursuing infantry.

Meanwhile, the battle reached Warsaw, where the Poles scored a significant success.

Although panic broke out in the streets of the capital on September 6, when it was announced that the High Command was leaving the city, relative calm had been restored quickly by Mayor Stefan Starzynski, who announced over the radio that the city would be defended and called on the civilian population to aid the army by digging antitank ditches and constructing obstacles.

The 4th Panzer Division reached the southwestern suburbs of Warsaw on the afternoon of September 7. Although it was a formidable force, the division had already lost 25 percent of its tanks because of combat losses and mechanical breakdowns, and it was a unit designed

for a rapid war of maneuver in relatively open terrain. It was certainly not designed or equipped for urban warfare, and its commander, Major General Georg-Hans Reinhardt, was clearly reluctant to advance into this built-up area. His delay, however, only gave the Poles more time to reinforce their defenses. When he did attack at 5 P.M. on September 8, his division was turned back with heavy losses—mainly inflicted by Polish artillery, firing over open sights. He attacked again the following morning, only to find that the defenses had been further bolstered during the night. The streets were blocked with improvised obstacles, and Reinhardt's routes of advance were covered by camouflaged 37-millimeter anti-tank guns and field artillery (mostly 75-millimeter guns), which were protected by infantry detachments. Despite Luftwaffe support, Reinhardt suffered so many casualties that he called off the attacks before noon. He was preparing to try again that afternoon, when the 4th Panzer was called away from the city due to the emergency on the Bzura. It had lost almost half of its armor—57 of its 120 tanks. The first Battle of Warsaw had been won by the Poles.

On September 9, Heinz Guderian's XIX Motorized Corps, which now consisted of the 20th Motorized and 10th Panzer Divisions, completed its redeployment and began its drive from East Prussia, turning the Polish right flank in the process. Its drive was opposed by a few half-formed reserves and some National Guard and local defense troops. As Guderian barreled through eastern Poland virtually unopposed, he effectively negated Polish plans to make a prolonged stand east of the Vistula and set up the possibility of enveloping and destroying the main Polish forces between the Vistula and the Bug.

Meanwhile, on September 9, Lieutenant General Tadeusz Kutrzeba, the brilliant commander of the Poznan Army, launched a desperate counterattack against the exposed, northwestern flank of Johannes Blaskowitz's 8th Army—the weakest such formation in Army Group South. He struck the exposed far-left flank of the army group, which was thinly held by the 30th Infantry Division. There was nothing else available to defend this sector. The rest of Army Group South's reserve—two infantry divisions—were too far to the southwest to be able to help the 30th. Major General von Briesen and his men were on their own.

Kurt von Briesen was a tall, bald, bullet-headed, bear of a man—and a thorough Prussian. He had disposed his infantry forces as well as could have been expected under the circumstances, but General Kutrzeba struck him with most of the operational forces of the Poznan Army, including three infantry divisions in the center and the Podolska and Wielkopolska Cavalry Brigades on either flank. The Poles had a numerical advantage of three to one in infantry, two to one in artillery, and 65 to 0 in tanks and armored cars. The

worst fighting took place in Leczyca, where part of the 26th Infantry Regiment fought the Poles in the streets, and at Piatek, which the Poles could not take until they committed their tanks. These delays gave General of Artillery Wilhelm zu von Ulex, the commander of the X Corps, time to reinforce Briesen with elements of Lieutenant General Friedrich Olbricht's 24th Infantry Division, but this was not enough to stem the Polish tide. By late afternoon on the 10th, both German divisions were in full retreat, some units were in disorder, a few units were routed, and the Poles had taken more than 1,500 prisoners from the 30th Infantry alone. A major breakthrough had been prevented only by the heroic efforts of General von Briesen, who personally led his last reserve battalion in a valiant counterattack that restored the German line. His right arm was blown off in the fighting, but he remained in command, despite the pain and the loss of the limb.[6]

The stubborn resistance of the divisions of the X Corps had given the Germans time to take countermeasures. The 213th and 221st Infantry Divisions from Army Group South's reserve were ordered to rush to the Bzura sector, to shore up the western flank of the X Corps, and Baron von Weichs's XIII Corps (two infantry divisions) was hurried to reinforce the center, where Briesen's and Olbricht's divisions were wavering under the pressure. In this critical situation, Blaskowitz asked that an entire panzer corps be sent to the endangered sector at once. General von Manstein, the brilliant chief of staff of Army Group South, firmly opposed this idea and declared that they should try to encircle the Polish strike force, rather than deal with it frontally. Rundstedt, as usual, agreed with his chief and, with the cooperation of General von Bock, gave orders for German forces to converge on the Poles from three sides. The 3rd Light Division, which was advancing toward Radom, redeployed in support of the 213th and 221st, which became the western pincer against the Poznan Army. The eastern pincer was formed by the 4th and 1st Panzer Divisions and the 18th Infantry Division. To the north, Bock ordered General of Artillery Curt Haase's III Corps to block the Polish escape routes and apply pressure from that direction. General von Blaskowitz was placed in overall command of the counterattack.

The Polish attacks continued on September 11 but, with German resistance stiffening, gained ground only slowly. They were also pounded by fighter, dive-bomber, and ground attack aircraft. Every available wing flew to the aid of the 8th Army, including hundreds of bomb carriers. General Kutrzeba later recalled that ''every movement, every troop concentration, every line of advance came under pulverizing bombardment from the air. It was just hell on earth.''[7]

By September 12, the Germans had regained numerical superiority in the endangered sector, while panzer and motorized forces closed the

ring around the Poznan Army. Trapped inside the pocket (called the Kutno Pocket by the Germans) were 15 Polish divisions and cavalry brigades. Most of these units, however, had been separated from their supply units for days, and were hungry, disorganized, exhausted, low in ammunition, and demoralized by the repeated and unopposed attacks of the Luftwaffe.

The jaws of the pinches inexorably closed around the scattered divisions. In all, Blaskowitz and Rundstedt brought 19 divisions to bear against the pocket, including two panzer and three light divisions. On September 16, the defenders tried to break out to the east, but they were met by Hoepner's XVI Motorized Corps. General Kutrzeba realized that the situation was hopeless and, on the evening of September 16, ordered that whatever units could escape were to do so. Sizable elements of two infantry divisions and two cavalry brigades infiltrated through the Kampinos Forest northwest of Warsaw on September 17 and later reached the capital. None of the other units escaped. The combined headquarters staffs of the Pomorze and Poznan Armies were destroyed in the Kampinos Forest on September 18. Major General Wladyslaw Bortnowski, the commander of the Pomorze Army, was captured along with most of his staff, although General Kutrzeba managed to escape.[8] The Poles now lost all symptoms of organization, and mass surrenders began. On the 18th alone, the Germans captured 80,000 men, 320 guns, 130 aircraft, and 40 tanks. The last resistance ended on September 21. One-third of the Polish Army had been destroyed.

Other than those forces engaged in the Battle of Kutno, most of the rest of the German Army in Poland was engaged in what the generals called a ''Rabbit Hunt'' between September 8 and 17. Given their superior mobility and air supremacy, the outcome of these battles was never in doubt, so long as the German commanders pressed their advantages. This they did with a great deal of enthusiasm.

The most difficult battle during this phase of the operations took place at Radom, in the southern sector of 10th Army's zone. It began on September 8, with von Wietersheim's XIV Motorized Corps enveloping the city from the north and Hermann Hoth's XV Motorized Corps closing in from the south, while von Schwelder's IV Corps tied down the Polish forces to the west. The fighting was heavy, but the circle was closed on September 9.

Organized resistance in the Radom Pocket ended on September 11, and the 10th Army took 60,000 prisoners. At the same time, elements of the IV Corps crossed the Vistula and headed for Lublin, which fell on September 17. Meanwhile, List's 14th Army crossed the San north and south of Przemysl on September 10, trapping most of the Polish 11th Infantry Division in the city. The rest of the Polish divisions was

pursued and pounded relentlessly by the Luftwaffe. One survivor recalled:

> The German aeroplanes raided us at frequent intervals. There was no shelter anywhere: nothing but the accursed plain.... After one of the raids we counted 35 dead horses, and a few days later the divisional artillery lost 87 horses in a single raid. Such a march was not like the march of an army; it was more like the flight of some Biblical people, driven onward by the wrath of Heaven, and dissolving in the wilderness.[9]

The remnants of the Polish 11th Division tried to reach Lwow (Lvov), but were overtaken and destroyed by the rapidly moving VII and XVIII Corps. Lvov itself was encircled by the XVIII Corps on September 14, along with a Polish garrison of 12,000 men. They would not capitulate until September 21, after the Germans turned back several breakout attempts.

By September 15, Polish resistance was disintegrating, except at Warsaw and in a few fortresses. The Krakow Army was in such bad condition that it could not fight its way toward Lvov, so it fell back to the east, pursued by the 2nd Panzer and 4th Light Divisions. Lieutenant General Rudolf Veiel's 2nd Panzer drove a wedge between the Krakow and Malopolska (formerly Karpaty) armies and turned north, beginning the encirclement of the Krakow Army, which happened quickly. The German infantry crossed the San River at Jaroslav on September 15, under the personal observation of Adolf Hitler. On September 16, the Krakow and the newly formed Lublin armies were surrounded and the Malopolska (formerly Karpaty) Army disintegrated. General Piskor surrendered the encircled forces northwest of Tomaszow Lubelski on September 20.[10]

Meanwhile, on September 12, OKH directed Bock to invest the Polish capital from the north and east with his 3rd Army. Accordingly, I Corps and Corps Wodrig turned sharply to the east, while Guderian was ordered to take Brzesc, to protect the left flank of the army group. The Poles fought desperately, but they did so without coordination or overall direction. On the 15th alone, General Wodrig reported the capture of more than 8,000 prisoners. The following day, Lieutenant General Walter Petzel's I Corps reached the Warsaw suburb of Praga and lay seize to the Polish capital. That same day Bialystok fell, and, after a three-day battle, the 10th Panzer and 20th Motorized Infantry Divisions stormed the Citadel of the fortress-city of Brzesc.[11]

Early on the morning of the following day, September 17, the Red Army crossed into Poland, to ''protect its fraternal Byelorussian and Ukrainian populations.''[12] It invaded eastern Poland with about 25 infantry divisions, two tank corps, and several independent tank and

cavalry brigades. This unexpected blow thoroughly confused the Polish forces still in the field; many thought that the Red Army had entered the fray to help them fight the Germans and greeted the Soviets with cheers instead of bullets. They were soon disillusioned. On the very first day of their invasion, the Soviets gained 40 miles, almost without opposition.

For Marshal Rydz-Smigly, the Polish commander-in-chief, this was the last straw. He ordered all units that were still capable of maneuvering to withdraw into Hungary and Romania, with the eventual aim of someday forming a rump Polish Army in France. He and President Ignacy Moscicki slipped over the border into Romania the following morning, followed by Colonel Beck, the foreign minister, and a few thousand troops.[13] They threw their weapons into a small stream on the border as they went, clogging it with rifles and machine guns.

The Soviet invasion of eastern Poland also shocked and astonished the German generals, who did not know the details of the secret protocols in the German-Soviet non-aggression pact. Even Keitel and Jodl—Hitler's two most trusted generals—were not informed until the morning of the invasion. The demarcation line was to be established along the Pissa-Narev-Vistula and San Rivers. Since German forces were already 100 miles east of these lines at several points, the foreign minister suggested that the German vanguards immediately withdraw to the demarcation lines.

Scattered Polish pockets continued to resist in southern and eastern Poland for several days, but effective opposition was now limited to three areas: the coastal sector, Modlin, and Warsaw.

The Siege of Warsaw began in earnest on September 18, when the city endured a sustained bombardment from the artillery of the 3rd and 10th Armies. The shelling continued for three days. On September 20, the 1st Air Fleet joined the battle, with dive-bombers attacking water works and other utilities. The German probes against the city were all turned back, however, indicating that morale inside the city was high, and the troops were well supplied with ammunition and other supplies, except for food.

During the third week of the war, Warsaw was slowly reduced by siege. Adolf Hitler visited the 3rd Army on September 22 and observed the shelling of Praga from a church tower outside the city. Later that day, he was informed that General Baron von Fritsch, the former commander-in-chief of the army, had died in battle. Despite his retired status, the general had exercised his prerogative as honorary commander of the 12th Artillery and had accompanied the regiment to the field. He had been killed by a Polish machine gunner at Praga. The bulletin announcing his death stated that he had ''fallen for the Fatherland,'' instead of ''for the Fuehrer and the Fatherland''—the standard

obituary of the day. Many historians believe that he deliberately sought death in combat and had, in effect, committed suicide, but no one really knows for sure. Hitler was unmoved by his death.

OKH decided that the 8th Army would be responsible for capturing the city and would direct all forces in the area, and Blaskowitz set up his headquarters southwest of the capital on September 24. Hitler wanted the city captured by October 3, when the Soviets were due to arrive to take possession of Praga, on the east bank of the Vistula. Blaskowitz, therefore, had no time to waste. He planned to begin his assault on September 26 with a heavy aerial and artillery bombardment, followed by a ground attack from the south. Baron von Richthofen, however, preceded him.

Several days before, Baron Wolfram von Richthofen, the commander of the Special Purpose Air Command, had proposed a method to end the siege that was typical of the man: he wanted to strike the Polish capital with a terror raid of the type he had pioneered in Spain. As early as September 10, he had ordered Colonel Seybold, the commander of the 77th Bomber Wing, to bomb the ghetto area of Warsaw the following day. He instructed the wing commander to use flambos—small, 22-pound incendiary bombs. They were made by filling a can with a mixture of high-octane aviation fuel and motor oil, and then connecting it to a small fragmentation bomb. Adolf Galland called it an ''early prototype of the modern napalm bomb.''[14] Seybold, however, had scruples against fire-bombing defenseless civilians, so, ''on his own authority and in agreement with his subcommanders,'' General Speidel recalled, Seybold ''diverted the group designated for this attack to targets of military importance in Warsaw.''[15] This humanitarian act cost the colonel his career, because Richthofen sacked him and sent him home in disgrace. The Baron was doubly furious because he had to postpone his terror attack indefinitely: Hermann Goering recalled his He-111s to the Western Front on September 12. Goering's motives were not as humane as Seybold's; he considered the Polish campaign militarily won and wanted to have his bombers on hand in case the Anglo-French tried to launch a major air offensive. (We know now that Goering's fears were unfounded, but, given the information he had at the time, his move was a prudent one.) In any case, the Polish Kutno counteroffensive forced Richthofen to commit his entire command against enemy ground forces for several days. On September 24, however, his aviation units were concentrated in the area of the Polish capital, and he received OKL's permission to launch his terror attack the following day.

General von Richthofen struck Warsaw at 8 A.M. with more than 400 airplanes. They flew 1,776 sorties and dropped 560 tons of high-explosive (HE) bombs and 72 tons of incendiaries. Since his

conventional horizontal bombers had been sent west, he used Ju-52 transports to drop the fire bombs. Two men in each plane hurled the two-pound incendiaries out of the cargo door, using ordinary potato shovels. The fires caused smoke clouds that reached altitudes of 18,000 feet; they were so dense that it was impossible to identify any detail of the city from the ground or the air, and some of the bombs fell within the 8th Army's lines, killing several German infantrymen.

General Blaskowitz was furious at Richthofen, who nevertheless refused to call off the raid, because his bombers (who could no longer see who or what they were bombing) were killing German soldiers. The argument became so heated that it was carried to Adolf Hitler himself. The Fuehrer ruled that the Luftwaffe could operate as it wished. The next morning, however, he reversed his decision, and Richthofen was told that the Luftwaffe would operate over Warsaw only at the direct request of General Blaskowitz. That ended the terror raids against Warsaw, although Richthofen did attack Modlin on September 26 and 27, and dropped a total of 318 tons of bombs on that city.

Meanwhile, General von Blaskowitz reduced Warsaw by more conventional military means. His troops moved forward on September 26. By that afternoon, the infantry penetrated through the first two bunker lines, and prisoners reported that communications within the city had been cut and electric power had failed.

On the evening of the 26th, two Polish envoys crossed German lines with a letter from Lieutenant General Juluisz K. W. J. Rommel, the city commandant and commander of the newly formed Warsaw Army, asking for a 24-hour cease-fire, so that a surrender could be negotiated.[16] His request was turned down, and German artillery fire was intensified. When OKH learned of the incident, it decreed that only 8th Army Headquarters could accept the surrender and that nothing less than unconditional surrender was to be accepted.

Lieutenant General Tadeusz Kutrzeba arrived at Blaskowitz's CP the following morning to accept the German terms on behalf of General Rommel. Hostilities ceased at 2 P.M. on September 27, and 140,000 Polish soldiers (including the Praga garrison) lay down their arms.[17]

The surrender of Warsaw effectively ended the Polish campaign. The city of Modlin, which was besieged by the 3rd Army, finally surrendered on September 29, and another 24,000 men were captured, including more than 4,000 wounded. The last Poles in the coastal sector surrendered to General Kaupisch on October 1.

The last major Polish force at large was Special Group Polesie, which included about 16,000 troops led by Brigadier General Franciszek Kleeberg, who did not surrender until 10 A.M. on October 6.[18] This capitulation marked the end of the Polish campaign.

During the 36-day operation in Poland, the German Army lost 8,082 officers and men killed, 27,278 wounded, and 5,029 missing. Some 223 tanks had been destroyed, including 89 Mark Is, 83 Mark IIs, 26 Mark IIIs, 19 Mark IVs, and 6 Czech-manufactured PzKw 35(t)s. The heaviest losses were suffered by the 4th Panzer Division, which lost 81 tanks, mostly in the Warsaw street fighting. Another 450 tanks were damaged. The Germans also lost 195 guns and mortars. Several motorized units were almost immobilized after the campaign, mainly due to the sustained operations they had undertaken over the poor road network. Guderian's entire XIX Motorized Corps, for example, was temporarily shut down in East Prussia after the campaign so that its vehicles could be repaired and overhauled.

Luftwaffe losses were quite low in the Polish campaign. It lost 285 of the 1,939 airplanes involved, and lost 239 men killed and 88 missing.[19] Many of the lost aircraft were destroyed when they piled up while attempting to land on the primitive Polish airfields.

Soviet combat losses totaled about 900 men killed and about three times as many wounded. Little else is known about their losses.

Polish casualties were, of course, enormous. They lost at least 66,300 soldiers killed, 133,700 wounded, 694,000 captured by the Germans, and about 200,000 captured by the Soviets. The Germans also captured 3,214 field pieces, 16,500 machine guns, 1,700 mortars, and huge quantities of small arms, ammunition, and other military supplies. About 100,000 Polish soldiers escaped to Hungary, Romania, or into isolated areas of their own country. It is unclear how many Polish civilians were killed or wounded in the fighting. The civilian population brought under German rule totaled 22.5 million people. About 750,000 of these were ethnic Germans, available for service in the armed forces. Some of the minorities, especially the Ukrainians, were not adverse to cooperating with the Germans. Most of the people incorporated into the Reich, however, had to be considered citizens of an occupied country, and the Germans had to post sizable garrisons there.

On September 25, with the campaign rapidly nearing its conclusion, Hitler ordered the establishment of a military government organization for the occupied territories, which would include four territorial military government commands, headquartered at Poznan, Danzig, Krakow, and Lodz. The commander-in-chief of the Eastern territories (*Oberbefehlshaber Ost* or OB East) was Gerd von Rundstedt, who was in charge of all four commands, plus all tactical units in Poland. Shortly thereafter, the Headquarters of Army Group North and 4th Army left for the west, followed by 10th Army.

The tactical organization was changed on October 3, when three frontier army commands were established, facing the Soviet Union. Third Army, headquartered at Ortelsburg, East Prussia, became

Frontier Army Command North; 8th Army became Frontier Army Command Center (and simultaneously Military Government Command Lodz); and 14th Army was redesignated Frontier Army Command South and concurrently Military Government Command Krakow. As the same time, Wehrkreise XX and XXI were formed from Military Government Command Danzig-West Prussia and Posen, respectively. They were placed under the command of two older corps commanders: General of Infantry Max Bock (XX) and General of Artillery Walter Petzel (XXI).

On October 12, Hitler directed that a General Government be established to control the German-occupied part of Poland that was not directly incorporated into the Reich. This was done to ensure that the SS, Security Service (SD), *Einsatzgruppen* (murder squads), and associated organizations would carry out Hitler's policy of ruthless destruction without interference from the army. He named Dr. Hans Frank governor general, with Seyss-Inquart as his deputy. Frank was responsible directly to Hitler. He would assume his duties when the Fuehrer decreed that the military government of Poland was at an end.

Several of the generals protested this reorganization, and Brauchitsch, through Keitel, brought their objections to Hitler's attention on October 17. Hitler responded two days later by announcing the termination of the military government, effective on October 26. From that day forward, Dr. Frank, who headquartered in Lodz and ruled from Krakow Castle, was responsible for the Nazi administration of Poland. Before long, however, Himmler and Heydrich were rivaling him for real power. The military was responsible only for security and border defense. OB East (now under Blaskowitz, who succeeded Rundstedt on October 19) now included the XXXI, XXXII, XXXIV, XXXV, and XXXVI Corps Commands, which were established on October 5, from the frontier guard commands that had taken part in the invasion of Poland. They controlled a dozen third- and fourth-wave divisions, the cavalry brigade, and various frontier guard and security units. The Army, however, was reduced to insignificance in the overall administration of occupied Poland, as was demonstrated by the case of Friedrich Mieth.

In January 1940, Reinhard Heydrich set up a liquidation camp at Soldau, Poland, near the East Prussian border. When Major General Mieth, the chief of staff of the 1st Army, learned about this, he assembled his officers and publicly denounced the SS. ''The SS has carried out mass executions without proper trials,'' he told him. ''The SS has besmirched the Wehrmacht's honor.''[20]

Hitler may not have known about Heydrich's actions in this particular case, but he certainly favored them in principle. In this semi-public clash between the army and the SS/SD, Hitler quickly came down on the side of Heydrich and Himmler. Mieth was relieved of his post on

January 22 and sent into retirement. His career was only rescued because Franz Halder (with some courage) recalled him to active duty a few weeks later, named him chief of operations at OKH, and even arranged for him to be promoted to lieutenant general—only five weeks after Hitler sacked him. The incident, however, demonstrated to the generals which side the Fuehrer was on and sent them a clear message that they had better proceed warily when dealing with the SS, and that they could file protests against SS atrocities only at the risk of their own careers.

Gradually, the demands of the Western Front resulted in the withdrawal of all of the former army headquarters from Poland to the West. Kuechler's former 3rd Army, for example, had been redesignated Frontier Army Command North. On October 22, however, it handed its responsibilities over to Wehrkreis I and withdrew to the West, where it became the 16th Army, under General Busch. Kuechler took charge of the 18th (formerly 5th) Army. Only part of Blaskowitz's old 8th Army Headquarters (now Frontier Guard Command Center) remained, and it was redesignated OB East on November 2, 1939, after Rundstedt's old headquarters had completed its transfer to western Germany, where it was redesignated Army Group A. The main components of the former 8th Army headquarters were sent west to form the headquarters of the new 2nd Army in the spring of 1940. Blaskowitz continued to direct a new and greatly reduced OB East, which included only the XXXIV and XXXV Corps Commands and the tactical forces of Wehrkreis I: a total of only 10 weak security divisions. In May 1940, OB East was itself redesignated as the 9th Army and sent to the West, and General of Cavalry Baron Curt Ludwig von Gienanth took charge of the German occupation forces in Poland as the OB East on May 5, 1940. Meanwhile, the rest of the Wehrmacht had arrived on the Western Front.

NOTES

1. Guderian, p. 50.
2. Speidel, ''Poland.''
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Tom Shachtman, *The Phony War, 1939–1940* (1982), p. 55 (hereafter cited as Shachtman).
6. Kurt von Briesen was born in Pomerania in 1883. He joined the army as a Fahnenjunker in 1904 and spent the first two years of World War I with his regiment, the 2nd Grenadier Guards, and was severely wounded. He became a General Staff officer in 1916 and ended up as Ia of the 239th Infantry Division. He was discharged with the honorary rank of major in 1920 but returned to

active duty in 1934 as a lieutenant colonel. He served as commandant of Neustettin and commander of the 69th Infantry Regiment before assuming command of the 30th Infantry Division. He was the first man in the Polish campaign to be decorated with the Knight's Cross. Briesen was promoted to general of infantry on August 1, 1940, and became commander of the LII Corps on November 25, 1940. He was killed in action on the Eastern Front on November 20, 1941.

7. Dale M. Brown and the Editors of Time-Life Books, *The Luftwaffe* (1982), p. 32 (hereafter cited as Brown, *Luftwaffe*).

8. Bortnowski (1881–1966) was a prisoner of war in Germany until 1945. Kutrzeba (1886–1947) managed to make his way to Warsaw, where he was named deputy commander of the Warsaw Army. He was captured when the city fell and also languished in German prisons until 1945.

9. Hansen W. Baldwin, The Critical Years, 1939-1941 (1976), p. 55 (hereafter cited as Baldwin, *Critical Years*), citing F. B. Czarnomski, ed., *The Fight for Poland* (1941), pp. 33 ff.

10. Tadeusz Ludwik Piskor was born in 1889. He was a deputy chief of the Polish General Staff in 1921 and became commander of the 28th Infantry Division in 1925. From 1926 to 1931, he served as chief of the Polish General Staff. He spent the next eight years as inspector general of the army before assuming command of the Lublin Army in September 1939. He remained a German prisoner until 1945 and died in 1951.

11. General Schaal had been injured and the 10th Panzer Division was now temporarily under the command of Major General Horst Stumpff (Zaloga and Madej, p. 152). Albert Wodrig was born in Berlin in 1883. He joined the Imperial Army as a Fahnenjunker in the artillery 1901. Commissioned in early 1903, he fought in World War I, served in the Reichsheer, and assumed command of Corps Wodrig (later XXVI Corps) on August 22, 1939. Promoted to general of artillery on October 1, 1939, he led the XXVI until November 1, 1942, fighting in the Western campaign of 1940 and on the northern sector of the Eastern Front. He was commander of Wehrkreis I from February 1, 1943, until February 28, 1945, when he retired. He settled in Essen after the war and died in 1972. Walter Petzel (1883–1965) was a native of Posen. Prior to assuming command of the I Corps, he had commanded Arko 3 (1935–36) and the 3rd Infantry Division (1936–38), and was chief of the artillery inspectorate at OKH (1938–39). He was promoted to general of artillery on October 1, 1939, and was named commander of Wehrkreis XXI—which was headquartered in Posen—on October 25, 1939. He held this post until the region was overrun by the Soviets in February 1945. Without an assignment, Petzel escaped to the west and settled in Hameln after the war.

12. Shachtman, p. 70.

13. Rydz-Smigly later decided to join the Polish resistance. He reentered Poland in late 1941, suspended his rank of field marshal, and made contact with some of the resistance leaders. He suddenly died of heart failure on

December 2, 1941, and was secretly buried in Warsaw under an assumed name. Moscicki, on the other hand, made his way to Geneva, Switzerland, where he died on October 2, 1946, at the age of 78. Foreign Minister Jozef Beck remained in exile in Romania, where he died on June 5, 1944. President Moscicki made his way to Switzerland, where he died on October 2, 1946.

14. Speidel, ''Poland.''
15. Ibid.
16. Lieutenant General Juluisz K. W. J. Rommel (1881–1967) commanded the 1st Artillery Brigade (1919–20), the 1st Infantry Division (1920), the 1st Cavalry Division (1920), and the Cavalry Corps (1920–23). He served in various staff positions from then until 1939, when he assumed command of the Lodz Army. He was given command of the Warsaw Army after the war began.
17. Lieutenant General Tadeusz Kutrzeba (1886–1947) was the former commandant of the Higher Level War School and inspector general of the army. He became commander of the Poznan Army in 1939 and was named deputy commander of the Warsaw Army in September, after his army had been crushed. He was a German prisoner of war until 1945.
18. Brigadier General Franciszek Kleeberg was born in 1888. He had previously commanded the 14th and 29th Infantry Divisions and the III and IX Corps Area Commands. He died in a German prisoner-of-war camp in 1941.
19. Irving, *Milch*, p. 82.
20. Irving, *Hitler's War*, vol. 1, p. 77.

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CHAPTER XVI
SITZKRIEG

Speaking before the Reichstag at the Kroll Opera House at 10 A.M. on September 1, 1939, Adolf Hitler reported that the Wehrmacht had ''returned the fire'' of the Polish aggressors and announced that he had discarded his party uniform and donned the field gray uniform of the army. He swore that he would never take it off until ''victory is ours'' or he was dead. At 11 A.M. on September 3, Prime Minister Chamberlain broadcast the news to his people that the United Kingdom was at war and ordered the precautionary evacuation of some 3 million children, hospital patients, and senior citizens from London and other cities. At that same time, the French submitted their ultimatum to the Wilhelmstrasse, demanding that Germany halt its aggression against Poland. It expired at 5 P.M., and the Reich was at war with France as well. But, at first, nothing happened. Despite a few minor air raids, neither side employed more than a small fraction of its air power in the fall of 1939, even against strictly military targets. ''If there was any part of the early months of the war in the West that can justifiably be described as 'phony,' it was the war in the air ... chiefly because neither side could clearly perceive, and both shrank from, the consequences of its commencement,'' Taylor wrote later.[1] Since neither side could predict what would happen if a full air war began, neither launched one. Aerial warfare did not begin in earnest until May 1940, and deliberate attacks against civilian targets did not begin until September 1940.

In the meantime, as mobilization took place throughout Germany, OKH reorganized itself into three components: the CP at Zossen, the rear component in Berlin, and the Replacement Army, which headquartered in the Bendlerstrasse block of the capital.

The General Staff at Zossen (a suburb of western Berlin) consisted only of O Qu I (Operations) and O Qu IV (Intelligence), the training and organization departments of the Central Office, and the newly

formed General Quartermaster section, directed by Colonel Eduard Wagner, who was responsible for supply matters and logistical planning.

The posts of O Qu II (training) and O Qu III (organization) were disbanded when the war began, and O Qu V (the Military History Branch) remained behind in Berlin, controlling the rear headquarters, the second echelon departments, and the General Staff branches not needed at the main CP.

The weapons and equipment offices and all of the arms inspectorates were amalgamated under the command of General of Artillery Friedrich Fromm, who bore the impressive title of chief of army equipment and commander-in-chief of the Replacement Army. His new headquarters (which was also known as the Home Army) also controlled the Wehrkreise, making it one of the most important commands in the German Army.

Although an opportunist and a man of shady personal character, Fromm had tremendous professional competence and had the services of dozens of highly capable officers—many of which were too old to go to the field, but who were perfectly able administrators. Upon the outbreak of the war, the various Wehrkreise immediately began to expand their internal organizations and two new types of divisions were created within the Home Army: replacement divisions (which were responsible for the military district's replacement and training functions) and the special administrative divisional staffs, which controlled general headquarters (GHQ) troops and local defense units. Table 16.1 shows the structure of the Home Army after the Wehrkreise had completed their reorganization in the spring of 1940.

The success of the German Replacement Army and the Wehrkreise system has not been widely appreciated by historians. (*Wehrkreise*, initially, is sometimes spelled *Wehrkreisen*.) The system, however, functioned extremely well, which is why the German Army managed to remain in the field for the next five and a half years, despite the ''genius'' of the Fuehrer. The Replacement Army certainly functioned well in the Phony War period, which lasted from September 1939 to May 1940. During this phase (as usual), the new German divisions were mustered in in ''waves.'' The five divisions of Wave 5 (the 93rd, 94th, 95th, 96th, and 98th Infantry) were activated in September. Four Wave 6 infantry divisions, numbered 81, 82, 83, and 88, were furnished with Czech equipment and mustered in in November. In February 1940, 13 Wave 7 infantry divisions (numbered 161 to 198) were formed, and 10 Wave 8 infantry divisions (numbered 290 to 299) were raised in February. Four *Oberrhein* divisions (554th to 557th Infantry) were assembled in February, and nine Wave 9 infantry divisions (all *Landesschuetzen*), numbered 351 to 399, were organized in March and April, and all were

Table 16.1
Order of Battle of the Home Army, Spring 1940

Wehrkreis I (Koenigsberg)
- 141st Replacement Division (Koenigsberg)
- 151st Replacement Division (Allenstein)
- 401st Special Administrative Division Staff (Koenigsberg)

Wehrkreis II (Stettin)
- 152nd Replacement Division (Stettin)
- 192nd Replacement Division (Rostock)
- 402nd Special Administrative Division Staff (Stettin)

Wehrkreis III (Berlin)
- 143rd Replacement Division (Frankfurt/Oder)
- 153rd Replacement Division (Postdam)

Wehrkreis IV (Dresden)
- 154th Replacement Division (Dresden)
- 174th Replacement Division (Chemnitz)
- 404th Special Administrative Division Staff (Dresden)

Wehrkreis V (Stuttgart)
- 155th Replacement Division (Stuttgart)[a]
- 165th Replacement Division (Ulm)

Wehrkreis VI (Muenster)
- 156th Motorized Replacement Division (Thorn)
- 166th Replacement Division (Elbing)
- 406th Special Administrative Division Staff (Muenster)

Wehrkreis VII (Munich)
- 147th Replacement Division (Augsburg)
- 157th Replacement Division (Munich)
- 407th Special Administrative Division Staff (Munich)

Wehrkreis VIII (Breslau)
- 148th Replacement Division (Gleiwitz)
- 158th Replacement Division (Liegnitz)
- 408th Special Administrative Division Staff (Breslau)
- 432nd Special Administrative Division Staff (Kattowitz)

Wehrkreis IX (Kassel)
- 159th Replacement Division (Frankfurt/Main)
- 179th Replacement Division (Weimar)
- 409th Special Administrative Division Staff (Kassel)

Wehrkreis X (Hamburg)
- 160th Replacement Division (Hamburg)
- 180th Replacement Division (Bremen)
- 410th Special Administrative Division Staff (Hamburg)

Wehrkreis XI (Hanover)
- 171st Replacement Division (Hanover)
- 191st Replacement Division (Brunswick)
- 411st Special Administrative Division Staff (Hanover)

Table 16.1 (*continued*)

Wehrkreis XII (Wiesbaden)
172nd Replacement Division (Mainz)
182nd Replacement Division (Koblenz)
412th Special Administrative Division Staff (Wiesbaden)
Wehrkreis XIII (Nuremberg)
173rd Replacement Division (Nuremberg)
193rd Replacement Division (Amberg)[b]
413th Special Administrative Division Staff (Nuremberg)
Wehrkreis XVII (Vienna)
177th Replacement Division (Vienna)
187th Replacement Division (Linz)
417th Special Administrative Division Staff (Vienna)
Wehrkreis XVIII (Salzburg)
188th Replacement Dlvision (Salzburg)
537th Special Administrative Division Staff (Innsbruck)
538th Special Administrative Division Staff (Klagenfurt)
Wehrkreis XX (Danzig)
156th Replacement Division (Thorn)
166th Replacement Division (Bromberg)
428th Special Administrative Division Staff (Danzig)
Wehrkreis XXI (Posen)
172nd Replacement Division (Gnesen)
182nd Replacement Division (Litzmannstadt)[c]
429th Special Administrative Division Staff (Posen)
430th Special Administrative Division Staff (Brody)
431st Special Administrative Division Staff (Kalisch)
Wehrkreis Bohemia and Moravia (Prague)
539th Frontier Guard Division (Spittal, Klagenfurt and Graz)
540th Frontier Guard Division (Tabor)
Wehrkreis General Gouvernement (Warsaw)
None

Notes:
[a]Redesignated 155th Motorized Replacement Division in the winter of 1940–41.
[b]Moved to Pilsen in 1941.
[c]Lodz was renamed Litzmannstadt in 1939.

sent to Poland, to free field divisions of younger men for employment in the West. The Wehrkreise system thus produced 45 new divisions from September 1939 to May 1940, and this figure excludes replacement divisions, special administrative divisions, non-divisional units, new corps headquarters, and independent regiments.[2] Over the same period of time, France did not produce even 10 new divisions.[3]

During the same time frame, Germany increased its number of panzer divisions to 10 by converting the four light divisions into tank

divisions (the 1st Light became the 6th Panzer, the 2nd Light the 7th Panzer, and so on). They were, however, smaller than the standard panzer division, having only one tank regiment of three battalions, instead of two regiments of two battalions each, as in the older divisions. At the same time, Germany increased its number of corps headquarters from 27 (at the end of the Polish campaign) to 44 (of which five were officially activated during the French campaign). The German corps headquarters in October 1939 included the 18 peacetime corps (I through XVIII), three formed for the Polish campaign (XIX Motorized, XXI, and XXII), two formed for the Western Front (XXVII and XXX), the former frontier guard commands in the West (now upgraded to XXIII, XXIV, and XXV Corps), and the upgraded Corps Wodrig (now XXVI Corps). Between October 1939 and June 1940, these were joined by 23 new corps headquarters, as shown in Table 16.2.

Eight corps commands (*Hoeheres Kommando* z.b.V., literally, ''Higher Commands for Special Purposes'') also existed by May 1940: the XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII, XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVI, XXXVII, and XXXXV. They lacked corps troops and were employed mainly in occupation duties, although the XXXI Corps Command did see action in April 1940.

The number of German army group and army headquarters did not increase between October 1939 and June 1940, but considerable regrouping and several number changes were made to deceive Allied intelligence. The 10th Army became the 6th, the 14th became the 12th, and the 3rd became the 16th. Headquarters, 8th Army, became Guard Command Center in Poland on October 3, 1939, but on October 20 was redesignated Headquarters, 2nd Army, and sent to the Western Front. After a similar process, 5th Army Headquarters became Headquarters, 18th Army. In May 1940, Germany had three army group headquarters (A, B, and C) and nine army headquarters (1st, 2nd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 9th, 12th, 16th, and 18th).[4] No 3rd or 5th Army ever existed again, although a new 8th Army was created on the Eastern Front in August 1943, and new 10th and 14th Armies were formed in Italy that same year.

Despite the excellent organization of the Home Army and the Wehrkreise, the German Army faced a serious problem in late 1939 and early 1940. Far too high a percentage of the German economy was still devoted to the production of consumer goods and the production level of the factories devoted to military equipment remained low. In the seven months from September 1939 to April 1940, only 1,630 antitank guns were added to the 11,200 already in the inventory. Only 459 infantry guns were added to the 3,800 already with the regiments, and only 281 150-millimeter guns were added to the 2,049 already with the German artillery units. Tank production was also low: only 537 modern models (PzKw IIIs and IVs) were manufactured in the seven months of the Sitzkrieg, and 380 of these were replacements for

Table 16.2
Corps-Level Headquarters Established Between October 1939 and June 1940

	Home Station/ Wehrkreis	First Commander
XXVIII	Brandenburg, I	LTG Count Walter von Brockdorff-Ahlefel
XXIX	Naumburg, IV	Gen.d. Inf. Hans von Obstfelder
XXXI[a]	Schwerin, II	Gen.d.Arty Leonard Kaupisch
XXXII[a]	Stralsund, II	LTG z.V.[b] Alfred Boehm-Tettelbach[c]
XXXIII[a]	Ratibor, VIII	Gen.d.Cav. Georg Brandt
XXXIV[a]	Kuestrin, III	LTG z.V.[b] Hermann Metz[d]
XXXV[a]	Goerlitz, VIII	Gen.d. Inf. Max Schenckendorff[e]
XXXVI[a]	Breslau, VIII	Gen.d. Inf. Hans Feige
XXXVII[a]	Olmuetz, XVII	Gen.d. Inf. Erich Raschick
XXXVIII	Schneidemuehl, II	LTG Erich von Manstein[f]
XXXIX Mtz	Gotha, IX	LTG Rudolf Schmidt[g]
XXXX Mtz	Luebeck, X	LTG Georg Stumme[h]
XXXXI Mtz	Brieg, VIII	LTG Georg-Hans Reinhardt[i]
XXXXII	Weiden, XIII	Gen.d. Pioneer Walter Kuntze
XXXXIII	Hanover, XI	LTG Ritter Hermann von Speck[j]
XXXXIV	Krummau, XVII	LTG Fritz Koch
XXXXV[a]	Rastenburg, I	Gen.d. Inf. Kurt von Greiff

Notes:
[a]Initially a corps command, rather than a corps (Armeekorps).
[b]a previously retired officer recalled to active duty.
[c]Until March 1, 1940.
[d]Promoted to LTG z.V. on March 1, 1940 and to General of Infantry on December 1, 1940.
[e]As of September 1, 1940.
[f]Promoted to General of Infantry on June 1, 1940.
[g]Promoted to General of Panzer Troops on June 1, 1940.
[h]Promoted to General of Cavalry on June 1, 1940; became a General of Panzer Troops on June 4, 1941.
[i]Promoted to General of Panzer Troops on June 1, 1940.
[j]Killed in action, May 81, 1940; replaced in June by General of Infantry Gotthard Heinrici and posthumously promoted to General of Artillery on December 15, 1944, to date from June 1, 1940.

obsolete PzKw Is and IIs. Worse still, the German automobile industry was producing fewer than 1,000 trucks per month, which was not enough to maintain current numbers.[5] On February 3, 1940, Halder noted in his diary that Germany's production amounted to 12,000 trucks per quarter, but only 4,000 were being allocated to the Wehrmacht, and only 2,500 to 2,600 of these were being given to the army. The chief of the General Staff recorded that the army was short 2,668

trucks, and many of the 120,000 it had on hand were old, obsolete, foreign, or otherwise undependable. To solve the problem, Halder called for drastic action: a sweeping ''demotorization program'' which would increase Germany's dependence on horse-drawn transport. The program called for the immediate procurement of more horses, horse-drawn vehicles, harnesses, and so on.[6] Although the demotorization plan was never enacted, its very suggestion indicates that the German Army was anything but the totally armored and mechanized force of the propaganda film and popular myth.

Meanwhile, the French and German armies in the Maginot and Siegfried lines faced each other along a 250-mile front.

Why the French did not launch a major offensive at this time has been the subject of controversy ever since 1939. In committing the bulk of the Wehrmacht to the campaign in Poland, Hitler and his generals had taken one of the most gigantic risks of World War II. They had left the Ruhr—their foremost industrial area, without which Germany could not wage war–completely exposed to Allied capture. For more than a month, the French had every advantage. They outnumbered the Germans more than five to one, and they were better equipped, trained, armed, and supplied. They had air superiority, 2.8 million men in front-line units, and more than 2 million in reserve, against 800,000 Germans, half of whom were Landwehr, inadequately trained, or (as was the case in one-third of Leeb's divisions) with almost no military training at all. Many of these men were not yet assembled,[7] and even those who were had ammunition sufficient for only three days of combat.

Maurice Gamelin, the French commander-in-chief, had 11,000 guns and 3,286 tanks, whereas Leeb did not have a single tank, and many of his 33 divisions did not have any artillery. Small wonder that General von Witzleben reported to Leeb that a major French offensive would break through his lines. And Witzleben's 1st Army was the strongest force in Army Group C; the other two armies were much weaker.[8]

Hitler agreed with Witzleben's assessment. On September 12, he summoned Goering, von Brauchitsch, and Keitel to his headquarters train at Ilnau and emphatically ordered them not to provoke the French in any way. The German regiments on the Western Front certainly did not take a provocative attitude, nor did the French. Both sides assured each other (via loudspeakers) that they would not fire the first shot, and troops from both sides secretly bathed together in the Rhine and exchanged food and liquor. French deserters even reported that their sentries were not allowed to put live ammunition in their weapons.

General Ritter von Leeb was especially concerned about a potential Allied thrust through the Low Countries because he had only two Landwehr divisions, one active duty regiment, and two untrained

Wave 4 divisions to defend the entire sector. A few days later, on September 7, he established an ad hoc headquarters, Army Detachment A under General von Hammerstein, to cover this zone, but he was able to give it only a few troop units. Baron von Hammerstein, however, was less concerned about an Allied offensive than the task of eliminating the cause of the war: Adolf Hitler. He spent the next few weeks attempting to lure the Fuehrer to his headquarters in Cologne, where he intended ''to render him harmless once and for all—and even without judicial proceedings.''[9] Hitler, however, would not visit Cologne, and, in late September, Army Detachment A was dissolved. Hammerstein was named deputy commander of Wehrkreis VIII and was retired again shortly afterward. He died in Berlin on April 24, 1943. Baron von Hammerstein never had the chance to assassinate the Nazi dictator he hated so much.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the lines, General Gamelin was sure that the Poles could hold out until spring; however, because he had promised Warsaw he would launch an offensive as rapidly as possible, he began one on the night of September 7–8. Dubbed Operation Saar, it was a limited objective operation, involving 31 of France's 93 available divisions, but only nine were actually engaged in combat against the Germans. The offensive focused along the sector opposite Saarbruecken: the most defensible point in the West Wall. Here they faced General von Witzleben's 1st Army, which had 17 divisions, 10 of which consisted primarily of recently drafted recruits or untrained reservists.

The French advanced along a very narrow 15-mile front. Badly outnumbered, Witzleben's troops fell back slowly, making skillful use of the terrain and maximum use of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, as well as booby traps. For some reason, the French soldiers had no mine detectors, so their advance was slow from the beginning. Also, many French artillery shells (which were manufactured during World War I) failed to explode. Their 155-millimeter shells could not penetrate German fixed positions, and their heavy 220-millimeter and 280-millimeter batteries were not equipped with delayed-action fuses, so they caused no damage to German casemates. German casualties were low, and the French had captured but 20 previously abandoned villages on September 13, when General Alphonse-Joseph Georges, the commander of the Northeast Front, ordered the offensive halted on the grounds that it was now strategically useless, since Poland was on its last legs militarily. The French Army had lost 27 men killed, 22 wounded, and 28 missing.

Paris immediately glorified the offensive. One bulletin stated that they had conquered 100,000 acres of German territory—an impressive-sounding figure, but it only amounted to a 1.5-mile advance over the 15-mile front. On September 9, Gamelin had written Warsaw that more

than half of France's active duty divisions on the Northeast Front were engaged in combat against vigorous resistance. The Germans, he claimed, were reinforcing their sagging front with large new formations, including Luftwaffe units. This simply was not true: the puny French offensive did not draw a single soldier away from the Polish Front.

On October 6, Hitler launched a ''peace offensive.'' In a major address to the Reichstag, he said that he had no war aims against France and denied that he had ever acted against British interests. He had, he said, done nothing more than correct the wrongs of the Treaty of Versailles and extended the olive branch to London.

Six days later, Chamberlain rejected Hitler's peace overtures. In a speech before parliament, he renumerated a list of Hitler's broken promises, lamented that it was no longer possible to accept the ''unsupported word of the present German government,''[10] and pledged to wage war against Nazi aggression ''to the utmost of our strength.''[11]

On October 16, to the alarm of his generals, Hitler specified that the offensive against France would begin between November 15 and 20, and on October 22 he ordered that the invasion begin on November 12. He told Brauchitsch that the British would negotiate ''only after a beating'' and that must be administered as soon as possible. This decision caused considerable consternation at Zossen because, until this time, OKH had assumed that the fall of Poland would be followed by a negotiated peace and had not seriously considered taking the offensive in the West.[12] Brauchitsch and Halder had planned to conduct a defensive war, at least for the foreseeable future, and Ritter von Leeb went so far as to denounce Hitler's proposed offensive as ''insane.''[13] Bock and Rundstedt, the other two army group commanders, also went on record against the plan, as did Brauchitsch and Halder; even Goering registered objections.

What especially appalled the German generals was the fact that Hitler reached his decision strictly on his own, without consulting a single military professional—not even Keitel, who, for once, publicly opposed the Fuehrer. He recalled that

> [T]he result was the first serious crisis of confidence between Hitler and myself ... Hitler violently accused me obstructing him and conspiring with his generals against his plans; he demanded of me that I accept and identify myself with his opinions and represent them without reservation ... he began to insult me and repeated the very offensive accusation that I was fostering an opposition group against him among the generals.[14]

Humiliated and outraged, Keitel worked up enough courage to submit his resignation a few days later. Hitler rejected the resignation,

telling Keitel that it was his prerogative to tell him when his services were no longer needed. He told the general not to be so sensitive.

Colonel General Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb, the commander-in-chief of Army Group C, also did what he could to prevent Hitler from carrying out his plan. Horrified by the prospect of violating Dutch and Belgian neutrality, and realizing that Brauchitsch could not be convinced to confront Hitler by just one man, he tried to establish a united front of army group commanders. On November 9, he met with Bock and Rundstedt at Kolbenz and suggested that they resign en masse if Hitler continued to push for the Western offensive. His idea, however, met with a frosty reception, and Leeb returned to his headquarters at Frankfurt in a depressed state. He even spoke with his chief of staff about unilaterally resigning his command, but, in the end, decided that this gesture would accomplish nothing, so he stayed on.

Reichenau, a pro-Nazi officer, also tried to talk Hitler out of the invasion of neutral Holland and Belgium. Hitler, who became very angry, told the maverick general to worry less about diplomacy and more about getting his panzers ready for the attack. Hitler even rejected a request, made by Brauchitsch and Halder at the end of October, to postpone the offensive until November 26.

Franz Halder, meanwhile, recorded that he was worn out and depressed. Under pressure from Stuelpnagel, Oster, and other members of the opposition, he had once again joined the conspiracy against Hitler. He was not at all confident that Germany could launch a successful offensive against the Western Allies, and the long-term possibilities seemed even more grim; on September 29, for example, General Thomas presented a thorough report, analyzing Germany's raw material and armaments position. Among other things, it stated that the Reich was facing a shortfall of 600,000 tons of steel per month, and Colonel Wagner, the chief supply officer at OKH, reported that the army had only enough ammunition to supply one-third of its divisions for 14 days and that the lack of ammunition stockpiles precluded a major offensive for some time. The situation grew so bad, in fact, that General of Artillery Dr. Karl Becker, the chief of the Army Ordnance Office (*Heereswaffenamt*), committed suicide in early 1940. The picture only began to improve after General of Artillery Emil von Leeb (the brother of Wilhelm) took charge of the office in mid-April 1940, but periodic munitions shortages and uncomfortably small ammunition reserves (especially in artillery rounds) would continue to haunt the army throughout the war.

As a result of his many problems and pressures, Franz Halder was a man plagued by deep, dark fears. He was afraid that the invasion would actually take place and would end in a catastrophe. He was also horrified that he might actually be forced to attempt a coup, which

might fail and bring disgrace to his sacred General Staff. He was kept awake nights worrying about security. Too many people knew about the anti-Hitler plot, including people who talked far too freely—such as Oster and Goerdeler, among others. Halder wrestled with his conscience over a monumental moral issue: should he, a devout Catholic, personally shoot Adolf Hitler? Would such an act be tyrannicide, or just plain murder? And what would be its impact on the Officers' Corps if the chief of the General Staff stained his hands with the blood of the leader to whom he had sworn an oath of personal obedience?

Three years later, with tears in his eyes, Halder told how he visited Hitler several times with a gun in his pocket, but could not bring himself to use it. He simply could not, ''as a human being and a Christian ... shoot down an unarmed man.''[15] He was just not born to be an assassin, he added, emotionally.[16] Despite his many concerns, however, Halder continued to prepare for the putsch, egged on by his more decisive deputy, Carl-Heinrich von Stuelpnagel.

As in 1938, the new plan called for troops loyal to the conspirators to seize Berlin. Among those to be arrested included Hitler, Goering, Himmler, von Ribbentrop, Goebbels, and ''Sepp'' Dietrich. A provisional government was then to be set up under Ludwig Beck. Forces to be employed included the 9th Infantry Regiment from Potsdam, the 3rd Artillery Regiment from Frankfurt/Oder, and the 15th Panzer Regiment, now back from Poland and at its home base of Sagan. Prominent individuals participating in this conspiracy included Lieutenant General Alexander von Falkenhausen, the commander of Wehrkreis IV; Thomas; Beck; Witzleben; Hoepner; Schacht; Goerdeler; Count von Helldorf, the police president of Berlin and his deputy, Count von der Schulenburg; former Ambassador von Hassell; Admiral Canaris and his deputy, Colonel Oster; SS Lieutenant General Arthur Nebe, the chief of the criminal police; Lieutenant General Friedrich Olbricht, the chief of the General Army Office at OKH and deputy commander of the Replacement Army; Lieutenant Colonel Henning von Tresckow, a member of the operations staff of OKH and the nephew of Colonel General von Bock; and possibly Reichenau as well.[17]

Other men would not take part in the conspiracy, in spite of their anti-Nazi convictions. When he was approached by Stueplnagel, for example, Geyr von Schweppenburg refused to participate, and his reasons were sound. After their victory in Poland, he declared, the troops were too loyal to Hitler and would not obey any orders to act against him; therefore, the commander of the 3rd Panzer Division remained on the sidelines, despite his intense dislike for the Fuehrer and his cronies. Most of the other senior officers felt the same way. Rundstedt, for example, told Halder virtually the same thing Geyr von Schweppenburg told Stueplnagel. Bock, Manstein, and Friedrich Fromm (who, as

commander-in-chief of the Replacement Army, occupied a critical position) also refused to join the plot, in spite of their opposition to the Western campaign.

When it became apparent to him that the majority of his senior generals were not prepared to move against the Nazis, Brauchitsch decided not to join the resistance, either. Stueplnagel suggested to Halder that they simply arrest Brauchitsch and lock him up when the putsch began, but this must have smacked of mutiny to the straight-laced Bavarian. He refused to consider it and began vacillating again, but finally reached his decision: if Hitler did not agree to postpone the invasion during his November 5 meeting with Brauchitsch, he would overthrow the government on November 12.

Walter von Brauchitsch met with Adolf Hitler at the Reichschancellery at noon on November 5. It was a fateful moment in the history of the Third Reich. The Army commander again called for the dictator to postpone the offensive in the West on the grounds that the weather was too wet and the winter days were too short for the Wehrmacht to take full advantage of its Luftwaffe asset.

''It rains on the enemy, too,'' Hitler rumbled, ominously.

Brauchitsch ignored the warning and plunged ahead. The Fuehrer maintained a stormy silence as the general pontificated on some valid military reasons for not attacking that winter. Among other things, the wet terrain would limit the speed and maneuverability of the panzers, the muddy airstrips and short winter nights would limit the number of missions the air force could fly, the ammunition stockpiles were still inadequate, and the light divisions had not yet been converted into panzer divisions. Brauchitsch, however, overstated his case when he made the rather stupid comment that the German infantry had shown little spirit in the attack. It is true that the German generals considered the infantry units of 1939 as generally inferior to those of 1914 (a natural consequence of a too-rapid military buildup), but Brauchitsch went much too far when he invited comparisons between the army of 1939 and that of 1918—the year the Second Reich collapsed. He spoke of incidents of indiscipline at the front and even alluded to ''mutinies'' in certain units.

Brauchitsch's last points were simply not true, as the former corporal realized at once. Instantly furious at being lied to, Hitler lost his temper and was soon screaming at the unfortunate Pomeranian, his face white with rage. He insisted that the general identify the units in which these incidents occurred and demanded details; specifically, he wanted to see copies of the death sentences that had been handed down as a result. He would fly to the units involved that very day and investigate, he roared. When the pale officer failed to respond to his tirade, Hitler seized the notes from his hand and flung them into his

safe. He was aware of the ''spirit of Zossen,'' he snapped, and added that it was incomprehensible to him how a commander-in-chief could blacken the reputation of the entire army in such a manner. ''Not one frontline commander mentioned any lack of attacking spirit to me!'' he snapped, before he stormed out of the room and slammed the door behind him, leaving the crushed and humiliated general literally trembling in his boots.[18] The entire interview had lasted only 20 minutes.

When Brauchitsch arrived back at OKH an hour later, he was still so shaken by the tongue lashing he had received that he could not speak coherently for some time. When he did, he told Halder that it almost seemed to him that Hitler suspected the existence of a conspiracy. When he heard of the Fuehrer's ''spirit of Zossen'' remark, Halder was also filled with terror. Hitler had meant the remark to refer to the spirit of defeatism at OKH headquarters—an attitude he equated with cowardice. Halder, however, took it to indicate that Hitler knew about the spirit of rebellion and treason that existed there—that he knew that Halder and others were plotting to overthrow him. The chief of the General Staff was seized with panic. He knew from the Night of the Long Knives what Hitler did to those who conspired against him. Fearing that the Gestapo might be there within hours—or perhaps even minutes—Halder burned all of the papers he had relating to the putsch and ordered everyone else to do the same. He then committed himself to launching the dreaded offensive in the West on the date prescribed by the Fuehrer and permanently withdrew from all conspiratorial activities. Although Oster and a few other diehards continued some delusitory plotting, Halder's reaction to Hitler's ''spirit of Zossen'' comment effectively ended the Wehrmacht's anti-Hitler conspiracy—for the time being.

Ironically, the weather turned bad the next day, and the offensive was postponed on November 7. Hitler would reevaluate the situation and consider rescheduling the invasion almost daily until January 16, 1940, when he finally yielded to nature and definitely postponed the attack until spring. The ''crisis of confidence'' between Hitler and his generals thus passed without a showdown, although hard feelings and animosity remained on both sides.

THE ALLIES PREPARE FOR WAR

At the time of Munich, the United Kingdom was totally unprepared for war, and she did little to improve her readiness over the next 12 months. As a result, when war broke out, only one of every 48 men was mobilized for the British armed forces. Even after the first four divisions of the B.E.F. (British Expeditionary Force) sailed for France in October, there were still 1.5 million unemployed men left in the United

Kingdom. Over the next seven months, from September 1939 to May 1940, the British raised and equipped only six new divisions. Germany raised more than 40 over the same period of time. France had already mobilized more than 100 divisions.

British industrial preparations for war were as minimal as their military preparations. The Chamberlain regime was now unpopular in Britain, so the cabinet at first refused to engage in food rationing and made no attempt to dictate what civilian industry could or could not produce. As a result, British industry continued to manufacture pleasure cars, while the B.E.F. remained short of tanks. The rich could still transfer their money from England to Switzerland or the United States, to avoid paying the new war taxes. The government remained content to believe that the Allied naval blockade would produce hunger, dissatisfaction, starvation, economic disaster, and military collapse in Nazi Germany. In fact, due to aid provided to Germany under the terms of Hitler's alliance with Stalin, the German blockade of Britain was probably hurting the United Kingdom more than the Allied blockade of Germany.

French preparations were just the opposite of the British. Where London did not mobilize enough men, Paris mobilized too many. One out of every eight Frenchmen was called to the colors. This massive mobilization had a disruptive effect on the French economy, French war industries, and French morale. French mobilization was carried out, as Gouhard said, ''calmly, punctually, but without enthusiasm. There were no flowers, no carriages with the inscription: 'On to Berlin.' The shadow of the 1,500,000 First War dead fell on the reservists called up once more ... all were afraid of seeing the terrible bloodshed started again.''[19]

The French High Command felt the same way. It drew very few lessons from the Polish campaign, other than the idea that it must give up any thoughts of a large-scale offensive against Germany until there were signs of internal disorder inside the Third Reich. This, French intelligence predicted, would not take place until at least 1941. The result was what the newspapers derisively referred to as the Phony War or the *Sitzkrieg* (that is, the sit-down war). This was not an entirely accurate description, because there were a few minor skirmishes and some shelling, but certainly nothing major. From September 1, 1939, to April 9, 1940, for example, French artillery fired a total of only 304,000 shells. It had fired an average of 5.5 million per month in 1918.[20]

Despite the fact that it was not engaged in any active campaigning, the French Army neglected training during the Sitzkrieg period to an almost criminal degree. After the completion of mobilization, the French 1st Army Group established a routine of training only a half a day per week. The rest of the time was spent on guard duty,

constructing field works, or doing nothing at all. French General Edmond Ruby later wrote, ''We were aware, in March 1940, that many infantry units had still not fired a rifle and had never used their anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons.''[21]

During the Phony War, the French did make some belated progress in the areas of motorization and mechanization. Largely due to the demands of General Gaston-Henri Billotte, the commander of the 1st Army Group, the French 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Armored Divisions were activated between January 16 and March 15, 1940, and the 3rd Light Mechanized Division was mustered in on January 1, 1940. The attitude of the senior French generals toward tanks, however, had not changed.

It is ironic that the French tanks were generally superior to the German panzers in 1939–40. The armor on all of the modern French tanks was 40 millimeters thick, as opposed to 8 to 13 millimeters for the PzKw I, 12 to 14 millimeters for the PzKw II, 30 millimeters on the PzKw III, and 20 millimeters on the PzKw IV (with 30 millimeters on the front plate). The older French tanks had the outdated low-velocity 37-millimeter guns, but the Hotckliss Model 39 (i.e., 1939) and the Renault 40 had good high-velocity 37-millimeter guns, and the medium D tanks and fast Somuas had excellent 47-millimeter guns. In addition, the main French heavy tank, the Char B, was said to be the best tank in the world at that time. It weighed 30 to 35 tons, had a 47-millimeter gun, and 40 to 70 millimeters of armored protection—more than the German anti-tank guns could penetrate. The B 1 bis was also formidable. It weighed 30 tons, and had two main battle guns: a 47-millimeter and a 75 millimeter, in addition to two machine guns. It was superior to anything the German industry had yet produced, even though the 75-millimeter gun could only shoot along the B 1 bis's main axis of advance. The French tanks, however, had been designed as infantry support vehicles. They burned their fuel supplies in three to four hours and their operational ranges was generally about half of their German counterparts.

The main British tanks and armored units suffered from the same deficiencies as the French. The best British tank was the Mark II (Matilda II), which had 75 millimeters of armor around the turret and front, making it the most heavily armored tank in the world at the time and quite invulnerable to the German 37-millimeter anti-tank gun. However, it had a maximum speed of only 15 mph and an operational radius of only 60 miles. It was armed with a 40-millimeter main battle gun.

THE ALLIED PLANS

In addition to preparing to fight the wrong war and dispersing their armor over hundreds of miles, the French generals were also

quarreling among themselves. Gamelin and his chief subordinate, General Alphonse Georges, disagreed about almost everything. Before the war, Gamelin envisioned a German invasion of Belgium, after which the French Army, augmented by the B.E.F., moved into the country, to take up positions along the Escaut (Scheldt) River, from Antwerp to Ghent. This relatively safe advance would enable the Anglo-French to occupy a small but defensible portion of Belgium and give the Allies the asset of the Belgium Army at little cost. After Poland fell, however, the safe advance no longer seemed politically acceptable. In November 1939, Gamelin decided that the Anglo-French forces should go all the way to the Dyle. The front would pass through Louvain, Gembloux, and Namur. Dubbed ''Plan D,'' this move would save Brussels and keep most of Belgium's population behind Allied lines, give the Allies a shorter sector to hold, and give them a front with greater depth. Georges objected to it because the Dyle was too far forward and might even be breached or overrun by the Germans before the Allies could arrive, but he was overruled by Gamelin.

In January 1940, Gamelin went one step further and decided to extend his advance all the way to the Breda area of Holland. This maneuver would give the Allies the support of the 10 Dutch divisions, in addition to the 22 Belgian divisions. It would also require 33 British and French divisions to advance into the Low Countries. Georges exploded at this order, because it would require him to commit all of his mobile forces to a rapid advance to the north, leaving him with virtually no reserves. What would happen, he demanded to know, if the Germans attacked between the Meuse and the Moselle? Adopting the Dyle-Breda Plan, he said, was tantamount to committing France's reserves before they even met the Germans. Again he was overruled.

Unwittingly, the French Army had decided to put its head in the noose.

THE NAVAL WAR

Meanwhile, the naval war was not going well for Germany.

Hitler's orders strictly limited the U-boats to the rules of prize warfare, meaning that they had to operate just like surface ships. The Fuehrer did not want another incident like the sinking of the *Lusitania*, which helped bring the United States into World War I. Freighters not in convoy had to be directed to heave to; then they had to be boarded and searched. Only after the ship's papers and crew had been brought to safety could the ship be sunk. Passenger ships could not be attacked. Excluded from these rules were troopships and freighters escorted by warships, which were automatically assumed to be belligerents.

The Fuehrer's orders were violated before the first day of the war was over. South of Rockall, and off of the normal shipping lanes,

25-year-old Lieutenant Fritz-Ludwig Lemp, the commander of *U-30*, spotted a large ship zigzagging in a suspicious manner. Under the terms of the rules of warfare, passenger ships and non-belligerents were not supposed to zigzag. Deciding that it must be an armed merchantman, Lemp fired two torpedoes and sank the vessel. It turned out to be the 13,581-ton liner *Athenia*, which had 1,400 passengers aboard. Fortunately, all but 112 people were rescued by nearby ships, which rushed to the scene. The world was nevertheless appalled by what many charged was fresh evidence of Nazi brutality. Twenty-eight Americans were among the dead.

Goebbels' propaganda machine immediately tried to put a new spin on the incident by blaming the British for the sinking. The English had torpedoed their own ship, the Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment declared, to provoke the United States into entering the war. Some of the German leaders may even have believed that this story was true, since no U-boat had reported the sinking, and Lemp, who soon realized what he had done, was maintaining radio silence. Hitler, however, obviously suspected that the culprit was a U-boat, since the next day, September 4, he issued even more restrictive orders, forbidding them to attack passenger ships, even if they were in a convoy.

OKM did not learn that *U-30* had sunk the *Athenia* until it returned from patrol on September 27. Doenitz immediately relieved Lemp of his command, swore the crew to secrecy, and had the relevant entries removed from *U-30*'s logbook. The German media continued to charge the British with responsibility for the sinking. The truth about the *Athenia* incident did not come out until after the war.

In the meantime, other U-boats, operating within Hitler's restrictions, were scoring their first successes. The most spectacular victory was scored by Lieutenant Otto Schuhart, the commander of *U-29*. Operating in the same sector as *U-30*, he captured and sank three freighters. Then, at 6 P.M. on September 17, he spotted the British aircraft carrier *Courageous*, with two destroyers in escort, southwest of Ireland.

Schuhart was tremendously excited, because this was a U-boat commander's dream: catching a major warship with a weak escort. He maneuvered until he was within two miles of the carrier; then, with a destroyer only 500 yards from his position, he fired three torpedoes from his bow tubes and dived. Two of his ''fish'' hit the 22,500-ton carrier and exploded below the water line. Within five minutes, Captain W. T. Makeig-Jones gave the order to abandon ship, and more than 500 men managed to swim to the destroyers and safety, but 519 were killed in the explosions or drowned. Captain Makeig-Jones went down with his ship only 15 minutes after Schuhart fired his torpedoes.

Meanwhile, *U-29* was bombarded with depth charges. Schuhart dove to 250 feet—100 feet lower than the maximum safe depth for this model of U-boat, but the destroyers continued to pound the area with depth charges for hours. It was after midnight before the exhausted and relieved submarines were able to inhale fresh air again. Then U-29 made good its escape.

After a German U-boat was attacked while trying to assist the crew of a British merchant ship, Hitler gradually became convinced that the old rules of naval warfare were outmoded and inappropriate for use in World War II. On September 30, the German Navy ceased to observe the Prize Regulations within the confines of the North Sea. In early October, German captains were given permission to attack any French or British ships running without their lights at night. And so it went. Step by step the naval conventions were undermined, violated, and partially renounced by the Germans, the Allies, and the neutrals, until they were more honored in their breach than in their observance.

Karl Doenitz was an unhappy man in the first days of October 1939. His U-boats had sunk 153,000 tons of shipping during the first month of the war, with a loss of only two submarines; however, he knew that this rate of sinkings would be impossible to maintain, largely because submarine construction had been ranked near the bottom of OKW's priority list for labor and raw material allocations. Much to Doenitz's disgust, both the Wehrmacht hierarchies continued to ignore the potential of the U-boat branch. The diminutive commodore, however, had an idea—a plan that would focus the attention of the entire world on his precious U-boats. He would launch a raid into Scapa Flow, the main Royal Navy base in the North Sea. The man he selected to carry out this daring plan was Lieutenant Guenther Prien, the commander of *U-47*—a man who would soon become legendary for his courage.

U-47 left Kiel on October 8 and surfaced off Scapa Flow on October 13, to find that the sky was as bright as day, due to the aurora borealis (the ''northern lights''). Prien suppressed an oath, and decided to ignore the added danger and try the raid anyway.

Fortunately for Prien and his crew, British security was lax. *U-47*, working against the current, managed to worm its way through the defenses without being seen. At 12:58 A.M., Prien lined up on what he thought were the enemy battleships *Royal Oak* and *Repulse*. Actually, he was lining up on the *Royal Oak* and the old seaplane carrier *Pegasus*. He fired four torpedoes at a range of 4,000 yards. One tube misfired, and, of the three torpedoes that were launched, only one exploded. This one, however, missed the ships and detonated on the anchor cable of the *Pegasus*.

Lieutenant Prien now expected a reaction similar to a kicked over ant hill. Nothing happened, however. There were no alarms,

searchlights, fire from coastal artillery, or destroyer attacks. The whole base appeared to be asleep. With incredible daring, Prien decided to attack again. He calmly turned south and made a wide circle, while his men reloaded the four tubes. The turn was made *on the surface*.

Later it was learned that the British officers who went to investigate had no idea that they were under submarine attack. They thought that the explosion must have been internal.

At 1:16 A.M. on October 14, Prien fired all four tubes at the *Royal Oak*. Two of them hit the huge, 31,200-ton battleship and exploded, detonating a magazine. The air was full of flying debris as the battleship was ripped apart. It capsized and sank in 13 minutes. Rear Admiral H. F. C. Blagrove and 832 crewmen were killed. *U-47*, still on the surface and a virtual sitting duck, headed for Kirk Sound and its escape passage. At one point, a British destroyer headed directly for the U-boat with its lights blazing, but somehow failed to see it and turned away. Prien and his relieved men were back in the open sea by 2:15 A.M.

Lieutenant Prien and his crew were now the heroes of the Third Reich. When *U-47* docked at Wilhelmshaven, it was met by huge, overjoyed crowds. Commodore Doenitz was there, as usual, but so was Admiral Raeder, which was most unusual. He hopped aboard the submarine, conferred the Iron Cross, 2nd Class, on everyone aboard, and announced Karl Doenitz's promotion to rear admiral. He then shook hands with everyone on the submarine, even the enlisted men—an unprecedented gesture for Admiral Raeder. But there was more to come. That afternoon, Hitler's personal Wulf-Vogel and a Ju-52 landed at Wilhelmshaven to transport the entire crew to Berlin.

When they landed at Tempelhof airport the next day, the crew of *U-47* was greeted by a cheering mob of thousands of people, demanding to see them. When Hitler received them at the Reichschancellery, he decorated Prien with the Knight's Cross, a recently established order worn around the neck and greatly coveted by the Officers' Corps during World War II. Prien and his men were Hitler's guests at lunch, and Goebbels' guests at the theater that evening. In their honor, the ban on dancing was lifted for that night, so the men could go night clubbing. More important, however, the theory that the submarine had had its moment in World War I but was now of little use had been exploded with the *Royal Oak*. Even so, although the U-boat was now finally recognized as an important weapon, Doenitz still did not receive the high construction priority that he wanted so badly.

Meanwhile, the pocket battleships *Graf Spee* and *Deutschland* received orders to commence commerce raiding in the Atlantic. At that time, the *Graf Spee* was off the coast of Pernambuco, Brazil, when it received its orders.

It was a truly formidable ship. Launched in 1933, it was designed to outshoot anything it could not outrun and to outrun anything it could not outshoot. It displaced 12,100 tons, mounted six 11-inch guns and eight 5.9-inch guns, had a speed of 26 knots, and an incredible firing range of 19,000 meters—far more than any other warships of that day.

In the next 77 days, the *Graf Spee* ranged across the South Atlantic, into the Indian Ocean and back into the South Atlantic, sinking nine merchant ships (50,000 tons) in the process. Its captain, Hans Langsdorff, a gentleman of the old school, was quite proud of the fact that he did not kill a single man in all of these encounters. He did, however, disrupt commerce throughout the South Atlantic and upset the entire British Admiralty, which sent considerable forces to track him down.

At dawn on December 13, the *Graf Spee* was heading for the shipping focus of the River Plate area, when it spotted Commodore Henry H. Harwood's South Atlantic cruiser squadron, which included the cruisers *Exeter* (six 8-inch guns), and the *Ajax* and *Achilles* (sixteen 6-inch guns each). Harwood started the battle by sending the *Exeter* forward to engage the *Graf Spee* alone, while the *Ajax* and *Achilles* maneuvered around the pocket battleship to take it in the flank.

The battle began about 6 A.M. Before the *Ajax* and *Achilles* could complete their maneuver, Langsdorff concentrated all of his firepower on the *Exeter*. By 7:15 A.M., when it was forced to drop out of the battle, all of the *Exeter*'s guns had been knocked out, and she was holed and flooding. As the *Graf Spee* turned on the *Ajax* and *Achilles*, the *Exeter* limped off toward the Falkland Island, where it underwent an extensive refit.

Next, the *Graf Spee* blasted Harwood's flagship, the *Ajax*. Although the British 6-inch guns scored a number of hits on the German ship, the *Ajax* was wrecked. By 7:40 A.M., it had lost more than half its guns and had suffered considerable casualties. Harwood, therefore, withdrew out of range. Captain Langsdorff had won the battle but did not realize it. He was worn out by four months at sea and was shaken by the losses his crew had suffered: 36 killed and 59 wounded. Also, during the fighting, he had suffered two wounds himself, one in the arm and another in the shoulder. The *Graf Spee* had suffered no vital injuries but had sustained enough damage to convince Langsdorff to make for the nearest port, to effect repairs, rather than risk returning to Germany through the wintry Atlantic gales. This move was a terrible mistake on his part. The nearest port was Montevideo in Uruguay—probably the most pro-British country in South America at that time.

Langsdorff dropped anchor in Montevideo after midnight. The following morning the German ambassador to Uruguay, Dr. Langman, boarded the ship and berated Langsdorff for not proceeding on to

Buenos Aires, a little more than 100 miles away, where the Argentine government was much more sympathetic to Germany. This was confirmed the next day, when the Uruguayan government yielded to British pressure and gave the *Graf Spee* only 72 hours—the time prescribed by international law—to complete repairs and leave port. Langsdorff estimated that he would need at least 15 days to make the ship seaworthy again.

Langman tried to get the time limit extended, but without success. Meanwhile, outside the port, the British heavy cruiser *Cumberland* joined the *Ajax* and *Achilles*. Also, after he attended the funeral of his 37 crewmen (another had died of his wounds), Langsdorff was handed a report, stating that the battleship *Renown* had joined Harwood. This report was false. It was a brilliant British deception measure that completely fooled Langsdorff into thinking that he was facing an overwhelming force. In reality, Harwood was not at all sure that he could stop the *Graf Spee*, should the pocket battleship attempt a breakout.

Langsdorff, meanwhile, sent a detailed report to Berlin, describing the battle and listing his options. He could try to break out and head for either Germany or Buenos Aires, or he could scuttle the ship. The captain was leaning toward fighting his way out, but Hitler and Raeder met in Berlin and agreed that the propaganda value of the *Graf Spee* being sunk in battle would be too great a moral victory for the enemy. They signaled back that they would prefer for the *Graf Spee* to be interned in Argentina, but, if circumstances warranted it, Langsdorff should scuttle the ship. Once he was convinced that he could not outfight the blockading British forces, this is exactly what Captain Langsdorff decided to do.

The *Graf Spee* weighed anchor at 5 P.M. on December 17. As soon as it crossed the three-mile limit, it stopped, and the skeleton crew completed its preparations for the destruction of the ship. Captain Langsdorff was the last man to leave the vessel. Fifteen minutes later, at 8:40 P.M., a huge explosion threw flames more than 100 feet into the air, and the *Graf Spee*, the former pride of the German fleet, settled to the bottom. That evening, most of the crew was interned. Two days later, Captain Langsdorff wrapped himself in an Imperial naval ensign and shot himself.

The *Deutschland* was more successful than that of the *Graf Spee* in only one respect: it managed to reach safety. Its North Atlantic cruise, which lasted from August 24 to November 1, only resulted in the sinking of two Allied merchant vessels. When she arrived at her new base, the Polish port of Gdynia (now Gotenhafen), she was rechristened the *Luetzow*. For propaganda reasons, Hitler did not want a ship named after Germany to be sunk.

When the *Deutschland* docked, it found that it had a new fleet commander. Hermann Boehm was the commander of the German surface

fleet when the war broke out. A highly capable officer and a veteran of 36 years' service, he had served in torpedo boats in World War I, commanded a battleship, served in various staff capacities, was commander of reconnaissance forces (1934–37), and simultaneously was commander of German naval forces in the Spanish Civil War (1936–37). He became commander of the North Sea Naval District (October 1937) and was named fleet commander on November 1, 1938. Less than one year later, Grand Admiral Raeder sacked him and sent him into retirement. The reason had nothing to do with Boehm's abilities or any mistake that he made; rather, it was because Admiral Raeder thought one of the operational recommendations that Boehm's operations officer made contained implied criticism of the grand admiral. Raeder did not take criticism well, whether it was real or imagined. He replaced Boehm with Vice Admiral Wilhelm Marschall, the former commander of surface raiders, on October 21, 1939.

The fall of Hermann Boehm is just one example of Erich Raeder's inability to make use of the abilities of a capable subordinate. His unsteady leadership is also apparent in the strange command structure he established at the beginning of the war. He set up two naval group headquarters, Naval Groups West and East (formerly Naval Districts Baltic and North Sea). In the chain of command, they came between the chief of naval operations (Raeder) and the fleet commander. If the fleet were operating in the North Sea, the fleet commander would be subordinate to Naval Group West; in the Baltic, it would be subordinate to Naval Group East. If the fleet were split, the fleet commander theoretically could be subordinate to both naval group headquarters simultaneously. Raeder made the unwieldy situation even worse by frequently issuing orders directly to the fleet commander, a flagrant violation of the chain of command. It was fairly common for a commander at sea to receive contradictory orders from the office of the chief of naval operations (SKL) and the group commander. To make matters worse, Raeder's orders were often vague—but a fleet commander's career was in jeopardy if he did not act exactly as Admiral Raeder thought he should have acted—after the fact. The unsure and fundamentally unfair standards of the grand admiral would ruin the careers of the first and second German fleet commanders of World War II. It would cost the third fleet chief his life, but this is getting ahead of our story.

THE BLITZKRIEG ECONOMY

And what was going on in the German economic sector while the Wehrmacht prepared for war? The surprising answer is ''very little.'' Almost all of Germany's real and possible enemies thought Germany

was fully prepared for war in all areas, including the economic sphere. They believed that since its ''seizure of power,'' the Nazi Party had deliberately and consciously directed the Germany economy toward waging war. Such views had, of course, gained strength in the face of Hitler's bellicose foreign policy and his apparent willingness to risk war. Goebbels' propaganda machine reinforced this misconception and the illusion of German preparedness. The public saw the Fuehrer and his lieutenants in uniform, the highly militaristic Nuremberg rallies, military parades, and so on. This is why so many people readily accepted Hitler's statement that he had spent 90 billion Reichsmarks on rearmament—a statement that was quite false.[22] Hitler, in fact, was looking for a short war and wished to avoid a properly planned war economy. ''Business as usual'' was the motto in the civilian sector in 1939—and 1940 and 1941. This was because the Revolution of 1918 had come as a shock to the entire German bourgeoisie, including Hitler and his cronies. As a result, Hitler was afraid to call on too great a sacrifice from the civilian sector, as Table 16.3 indicates. Instead of ''guns, *not* butter,'' the German war slogan should have been ''guns *and* butter.'' In fact, German consumer expenditures in 1942 were at almost exactly the same levels as they were in 1937, and the civilian sector was almost the same size. Germany had a high degree of armament readiness and a great many stockpiled weapons, but a low degree of armaments and weapons production capability. By September 1939, for example, Great Britain was already producing almost as many airplanes as Germany and was actually producing more tanks. The Reich, however, still had a significant lead, since it had been pursuing a program of limited armament much longer than had the British.[23]

The Third Reich had also taken advantage of the years of peace to stockpile raw materials, especially foodstuffs. From the Revolution of 1918, Hitler drew the logical conclusion that, in any future war, Germany must be better prepared economically than in 1914, especially in the area of food supply. When war did break out, Germany had a grain reserve of 6 million tons—an amount equal to three years of import requirements.[24] Despite its stockpiles, however, the German economy was by no means ready for a long war. In 1939, coal was the only vital raw material with which Germany was well endowed. She was short of iron ore and produced no rubber, no chrome, and no nickel, which was vital for armaments steel. Other than stockpiles, she had no tungsten, which was essential for high-speed tools. The Reich also had no natural deposits of molybdenum or manganese, and little zinc, lead, copper, or tin. In addition, Germany was short of oil and was extremely dependent on Romanian petroleum–which was an unreliable source, particularly when one considers that British, Dutch, and American interests controlled about 52 percent of the capital in the

Table 16.3
Quarterly Allocation of Finished Steel, 1939–40
(in thousands of metric tons)

	1939	1940			
	4th Qtr	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr
Army	300	342	348	305	351
Navy	125	140	122	140	155
Luftwaffe	222	195	160	230	270
Construction	206	247	252	224	241
Exports	173	200	200	258	302
Civil Sector	732	780	769	800	908
TOTALS	1,764	1,904	1,851	1,957	2,227
Wehrmacht Total	850	924	882	899	1,017
Civil Sector	732	780	769	800	908
Civil Sector as percent of the absolute total	41.5	41.0	41.5	40.9	40.8

Source:
Alan S. Milward, *The German Economy at War* (1965), p. 30.

Romanian oil industry. By the first quarter of 1940, General Thomas estimated that the German economy's supply of fuel was falling short by 50,000 to 60,000 tons per month, in spite of the fact that it was importing 100,000 tons per month from Romania. At the same time, Romania was exporting 255,000 tons a month to Britain.[25]

In addition, the German economy was poorly organized for war. Three organizations might have supplied the necessary direction for the war economy: the Office of the Four-Year Plan, the Ministry of Economics, or the Wehrmacht. None did, however, because Hitler would never place any one person or organization in charge of the war economy. Instead, he added to the competition by creating the ministry of armaments and munitions on March 17, 1940. Initially, it was headed by Dr. Fritz Todt, the builder of the autobahns. As a result, in the field of economics, the German war effort was fragmented and suffered from a lack of direction and duplication of effort throughout the war.

To make matters worse, the Gauleiters were able to exercise a tremendous influence on the economy. These regional Nazi Party chieftains naturally practiced regional economics. They would defend their skilled workers and plants in their provinces against rationalization and centralization of production and economic planning. Such centralization of planning and authority as existed was in the hands of Adolf Hitler, a neophyte at strategy and economic warfare. From 1939 until 1942, he frequently changed the priorities of the war economy but did

not increase its size. For the attack against France, for example, he called for increased production of motorized vehicles and armor; then he switched priority to naval equipment and aircraft. Then, before the invasion of the Soviet Union, priority was shifted to general army equipment, and then back to airplanes when it looked as if the Soviet Union would be defeated. This inconsistency caused severe disruptions in the already inadequate German war economy.

NOTES

1. Taylor, *March*, p. 75.
2. Georg Tessin, *Verbaende und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg, 1939–1945* (1973), vols. 3–5 (hereafter cited as Tessin, *Verbaende*); Mueller-Hillebrandt, *Das Heer*, vol. 2.
3. Pertinax, *The Gravediggers of France* (1944), p. 16 (hereafter cited as Pertinax).
4. Tessin, *Verbaende*, vols. 3–5.
5. A. Gouhard, *The Battle of France, 1940* (1959), p. 75 (hereafter cited as Gouhard).
6. Addington, p. 93; Franz Halder, *The Halder War Diary, 1939–1942*, Charles Burdick and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, ed. (1988), February 3 and 4, 1940 (hereafter cited as Halder Diaries).
7. Jon Kimche, *The Unfought Battle* (1968), pp. 88–91.
8. Ibid., pp. 89–91.
9. Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis*, p. 459.
10. Taylor, *March*, p. 39.
11. Robert Goralski, *World War II Almanac, 1931–1945* (1981), p. 98 (hereafter cited as Goralski).
12. Halder Diaries, October 17, 1939.
13. Cooper, *German Army*, p. 179.
14. Keitel, p. 100.
15. Deutsch, *Twilight*, p. 129.
16. Hoffmann, p. 129.
17. Ibid., pp. 129–31.
18. Irving, *Hitler's War*.
19. Gouhard, p. 55.
20. Pertinax, p. 22.
21. Gouhard, p. 80.
22. Alan S. Milward, *The German Economy at War* (1965), pp. 4–5 (hereafter cited as Milward).
23. Ibid., p. 6.
24. Lothar Burchardt, ''The Impact of the War Economy on the Civilian Population of Germany during the First and Second World Wars'' in Deist, *Total War*, p. 47.
25. Milward, pp. 49–50.

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CHAPTER XVII

DENMARK AND NORWAY

WESER: THE INVASIONS OF DENMARK AND NORWAY

The invasions of Denmark and Norway had their genesis in the mind of Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, the commander-in-chief of OKM. Raeder was a staunch advocate of the ''siege of Britain'' strategy, because it would involve a much greater role for the navy in the German war effect, even though the navy was grossly ill-prepared to carry out this strategy. At that time, OKM only had 29 submarines capable of operating in the Atlantic, but this problem, Raeder felt, could be overcome in time. Higher priority, however, would have to be placed on the construction of U-boats, as well as on the surface fleet and on aircraft with sufficient range to attack the shipping lanes west of Britain. The navy would also need to acquire bases that would give it the freedom to act outside of the North Sea. Raeder was thinking in terms of two ports in particular: Narvik and Trondhelm, both in Norway. He first broached the subject of invading Norway to Hitler on October 10, 1939, but the dictator was too preoccupied with his plans for the invasion of the West to take the proposed Norwegian foray seriously. He basically believed that Great Britain would respect the neutrality of Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland.

On December 11, Raeder came into contact with Vidkum Quisling, the leader of the Norwegian National Union Party, the Norwegian version of the Nazi Party. Quisling shrewdly played up the pro-British attitudes of the government in Oslo and pointed out the danger of British occupation. He even told the grand admiral that Oslo had already agreed not to oppose a British invasion if Norway became involved in a war with one of the other great powers. Quisling's comments fit in nicely with what Raeder wanted to believe, so he arranged for Quisling to meet with the Fuehrer. They conferred at the Reichschancellery on December 14 and 18. The former Norwegian minister of war obviously

impressed the dictator, who still wished to preserve Norwegian neutrality, but said that he would be forced to take countermeasures if Britain showed signs of extending the war into Scandinavia. Hitler also ordered OKW to prepare contingency plans for Norway. The detailed planning was to be done by Major General Jodl, the chief of the Operations Staff of the OKW, and was to be kept strictly under the control of OKW. This was a major departure from German military tradition; historically, all major joint-service contingency planning was done by the General Staff of the army.

Once he handed the Norwegian problem over to Jodl and OKW, Adolf Hitler again immersed himself in the planning for the invasion of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands and once again forgot about the Scandinavian problem. It is certain that Hitler was sincere in his willingness to respect Scandinavian neutrality, provided Great Britain seemed willing to do the same; however, because his vital iron ore supplies were vulnerable to a British attack against Narvik, Hitler felt that he could not afford to give the British the opportunity to occupy Norway before he did. Also, part of his cautiousness can be expanded by the *Graf Spee* incident: Hitler was understandably reluctant to commit his small surface fleet to a major action against the Royal Navy. He therefore adopted an attitude of suspicious watchfulness; he would not move against Norway until it was obvious to him that the United Kingdom was no longer prepared to respect Oslo's neutrality.

Meanwhile, because of bad weather, the invasion of France and the Low Countries was postponed time after time. On January 20, Hitler finally concluded that the invasion could not begin until March at the earliest; he therefore decided that planning for a campaign in the Far North must be intensified, since the delay in the West might give the Anglo-French time to intervene in the region.[1] This was made more likely by the Soviet invasion of Finland. There was considerable pressure on the Allied governments to help the ''gallant Finns,'' while anti-German sentiment in Scandinavia—because of the Hitler-Stalin pact—was at a high point. It was quite conceivable that the British would seize the port of Narvik and the iron ore deposits in northern Sweden, on the pretext of providing ''aid'' to the Finns; in fact, we now know that this was exactly what Winston Churchill was advocating. It was also conceivable that the Norwegians and Swedes might not resist such an occupation. To forestall the Allies, therefore, Working Staff Krancke was established at OKW. Under the overall direction of naval Captain Theodor Krancke, the former commander of the *Admiral Scheer*, it produced a workable operations plan, which called for simultaneous landings at Oslo, Kristansand, Arendal, Stavanger, Bergen, Trondhelm, and Narvik. It believed that the operations could be restricted to the seven main ports and that the Norwegian Army would put up only token

resistance. The Krancke staff asserted that Operation Weseruebung could be carried out by modest forces: one corps, composed of the 7th Air Division (the German parachute division), the 22nd Air Landing Division, the 11th Motorized Rifle Brigade, one mountain division, and six reinforced infantry regiments. About half of the troops would be transported by aircraft and about half by fast warships. The success of the operation would depend on speed and surprise. Hitler, however, was still not convinced that it would be necessary for Germany to invade Norway.

The turning point in Hitler's attitude toward the prospective invasion occurred on February 17, 1940. The *Altmark*, the *Graf Spee's* supply ship, had escaped the debacle off the River Platte and managed to elude the British blockade. It was not sighted by the Royal Navy until February 14, when a reconnaissance airplane spotted it steaming south, down the Norwegian coast, in Norwegian territorial waters. The British knew that about 300 British merchant seamen, captured by the *Graf Spee*, were aboard, even though the Norwegian officials—who had made a cursory inspection—had found no prisoners. First Sea Lord Winston Churchill nevertheless ordered Captain Philip Vian to seize the *Altmark*, despite the fact that it was in Norwegian waters. This was a direct violation of Norwegian neutrality, but Captain Vian carried out his orders with enthusiasm in the Joesing Fjord on the night of February 16–17. Two Norwegian torpedo boats, which had been assigned the task of escorting the *Altmark*, did not intervene. Six Germans were killed and five wounded as the British boarding party forced its way onto the *Atlmark*, machine guns blazing. The unarmed German crew did not fire a shot. Once on board, the men of the *Cossack* found and liberated 299 British prisoners, who were locked in storerooms and in an empty oil tank, to hide them from Norwegian inspectors. The Norwegian government registered a vehement protest, which Prime Minister Chamberlain rejected on the grounds that Norway herself had violated international law by allowing its waters to be used by the Germans to transport British prisoners to Nazi prisoner-of-war camps.

Hitler was infuriated by the incident. He was convinced that Norway had not done enough to prevent British warships from attacking a German vessel in its waters, and he was now certain that the United Kingdom would not hesitate to occupy the entire country if it were in Allied interests to do so. The fact that Captain Vian was decorated with the Victoria Cross for seizing a German supply vessel in neutral waters was a further indication that the attack had the full approval of the highest levels of the British government. The Fuehrer had made his decision by February 19, when he demanded that the planning for Operation Weseruebung be speeded up. At Jodl's suggestion, General of Infantry Nikolaus von Falkenhorst, the commander of the XXI Corps,

was chosen to command the operation, because he had briefly served in Finland at the end of in World War I.

Falkenhorst, the descendant of an old Silesian military family, first met Adolf Hitler at the Reichschancellery shortly before noon on February 21 and was quite surprised when the Fuehrer offered him command of the invasion force, which now included five divisions. He accepted enthusiastically. Hitler told him to report back to the Chancellery in five hours, to outline his plan for the campaign.

General von Falkenhorst had no maps, no staff, and no help of any kind. His first step was to go to a bookstore, where he purchased a Baedeker travel guide. Next he went back to his hotel room, where he decided to use one of his five divisions to capture each of Norway's major harbors: Oslo, Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim, and Narvik (south to north). His plan was similar to that of the Krancke Staff, and Hitler approved it at once. He then ordered Falkenhorst to get on with the detailed planning as soon as possible. His select staff began work in Berlin on February 26.

To plan and direct the invasion of Norway, Falkenhorst was allowed to retain his own headquarters, key members of which were secretly moved to secluded quarters in the Bendlerstrasse. The headquarters was upgraded to Group XXI on March 1.[2] Significantly, both Brauchitsch and Halder were kept largely in the dark about Falkenhorst's mission. When he asked for a mountain division, Hitler approved his request without consulting OKH.

Falkenhorst's first major change from the Krancke Plan concerned Denmark. Unlike Krancke, the infantry general did not want to rely on diplomatic pressure to ensure Danish cooperation. On February 28, he asked Keitel for a provisional corps headquarters of two divisions to invade and occupy Jutland. Hitler approved the request the following day, along with an OKW recommendation reducing the commitment of the 22nd Air Landing Division by half and cutting the number of paratroopers earmarked for Norway to four companies. The delivery of the invasion forces to their objective areas would be primarily the responsibility of the Navy. Hitler also divided the operation into *Weseruebung Sued* (the invasion of Denmark) and *Weseruebung Nord* (the invasion of Norway). He issued his ''Directive for Case Weseruebung'' on March 1. This Fuehrer Directive immediately brought a wave of protests from the army and Luftwaffe. OKH did not want a significant diversion of forces from the primary operation (that is, the invasion of France and the Low Countries), and they objected to the fact that OKW was in charge of the invasions. Moreover, Hermann Goering was jealous and his feelings were hurt because OKL had not been consulted in the planning process, so he stormed into the Chancellery and told Hitler that he did not want his air force units under the command of the

army. At this time Goering's influence with the Fuehrer was still great, so Hitler agreed that all Luftwaffe units would be under the command of the X Air Corps, which was to receive its orders from OKL, ''based on the requirements of Group XXI.''[3]

Meanwhile, on March 7, Hitler assigned the 3rd Mountain Division, four infantry divisions, and the 11th Motorized Rifle Brigade to Group XXI for the invasion of Norway. He also gave Falkenhorst the XXXI Corps Command (General of Fliers Leonhard Kaupisch) and three infantry divisions for the occupation of Denmark. Falkenhorst, however, assigned the 11th Motorized Brigade to the Jutland operation and shifted the 214th Infantry to Norway. Air operations were to be supervised initially by the X Air Corps under Lieutenant General Hans Geisler, an officer who had served in the German Navy for many years before joining the Luftwaffe. His forces included 500 transports, 290 bombers, 40 dive-bombers, 70 twin-engine fighters, 30 single-engine fighters, and 70 coastal and long-range reconnaissance aircraft: 1,000 airplanes in all. Table 17.1 shows the Order of Battle for the German forces in the Scandinavian campaign.

By mid-March, Hitler was of the opinion that Scandinavia was likely to be a permanent sphere of unrest unless he intervened and therefore considered Weseruebung necessary. Jodl and Raeder agreed, but Jodl's deputy, Walter Warlimont, expressed his doubts, and Captain Krancke voiced the opinion that there were more drawbacks than advantages to the invasion. Hitler seemed to agree and would have preferred to await developments, but the time for vacillation was over, as the grand admiral diplomatically told him on March 26. All naval operations (including those of the U-boats) had been brought to a halt because of Weseruebung, and it was imperative that they be resumed. Also, the ice had now melted in the Baltic and the nights were getting shorter in the northern latitudes; it was essential that the invasion begin by April 15, or the period of darkness would be too short to afford proper cover for the naval landing forces. The Fuehrer nodded and promised to set the date of the invasion for some time in the next new moon period, which began on April 7. Figures 17.1 and 17.2 show the final plans for the conquests of Denmark and Norway, respectively, and how the invasions were carried out.

On April 1, Hitler conducted a review of the details of the plan, which included briefings by Falkenhorst, all landing commanders, and all senior naval and air officers. Basically, the assault forces and their equipment would be brought ashore by 12 naval echelons. Because the strength of the German Navy was so inferior to that of the Royal Navy, speed and surprise were essential; therefore, the initial assault troops would be transported by warships. Once they secured the airfields, reinforcements would be brought in overland from Oslo, or could be flown in, if necessary. The initial seaborne assaults could bring in

Table 17.1
Order of Battle, German Forces Employed in the Invasion of Denmark and Norway, April–June 1940

Supreme Commander: Hitler
OKW: Colonel General Wilhelm Keitel
  Chief of Operations: Major General Alfred Jodl
Group XXI: General of Infantry Nikolaus von Falkenhorst
    Chief of Staff: Colonel Erich Buschenhagen
  3rd Mountain Division: Major General Eduard Dietl[a]
  69th Infantry Division: Major General Hermann Tittel
  163rd Infantry Division: Lieutenant General Erwin Engelbrecht
  181st Infantry Division: Major General Kurt Woytasch
  196th Infantry Division: Major General Richard Pellengahr[b]
  214th Infantry Division: Major General Max Horn
  2nd Mountain Division: Lieutenant General Valentin Feurstein
XXXI Corps: General of Fliers Leonhard Kaupisch
    Chief of Staff: Major General Kurt Himer
  198th Infantry Division: Major General Otto Roettig
  170th Infantry Division: Major General Walter Wittke
  11th Motorized Infantry Brigade
  Miscellaneous Luftwaffe Units[c]
5th Air Fleet[d]: Colonel General Erhard Milch[e]
  X Air Corps: Lieutenant General Hans Geisler
    4th Bomber Wing
    26th Bomber Wing
    30th Bomber Wing
    1st Transport Wing
    108th Transport Wing
    seven transport groups
  Luftgaukommando Norway[d]
Naval Group West: Generaladmiral Alfred Saalwaechter[f]
Naval Group East: Admiral Rolf Carls[g]

Notes:
[a]Dietl was promoted to lieutenant general on April 17, to rank from April 1.
[b]Promoted to lieutenant general on June 1.
[c]Including one parachute company, the motorcycle company of the Regiment ''General Goering,'' and two antiaircraft battalions.
[d]Activated April 12, 1940.
[e]Succeeded by General of Fliers Hans-Juergen Stumpff, May 11, 1940.
[f]Responsible for operations in the North Sea and on the Atlantic coast of Norway.
[g]Responsible for operations in the Baltic Sea, Kattegat, and Skagerrak.

8,850 men and would begin on ''W Day.'' These assaults were to be followed by eight sea transport echelons, carrying reinforcements and equipment. A naval Export Echelon (*Ausfuhrstaffel*) of seven ships

Figure 17.1
The Conquest of Denmark

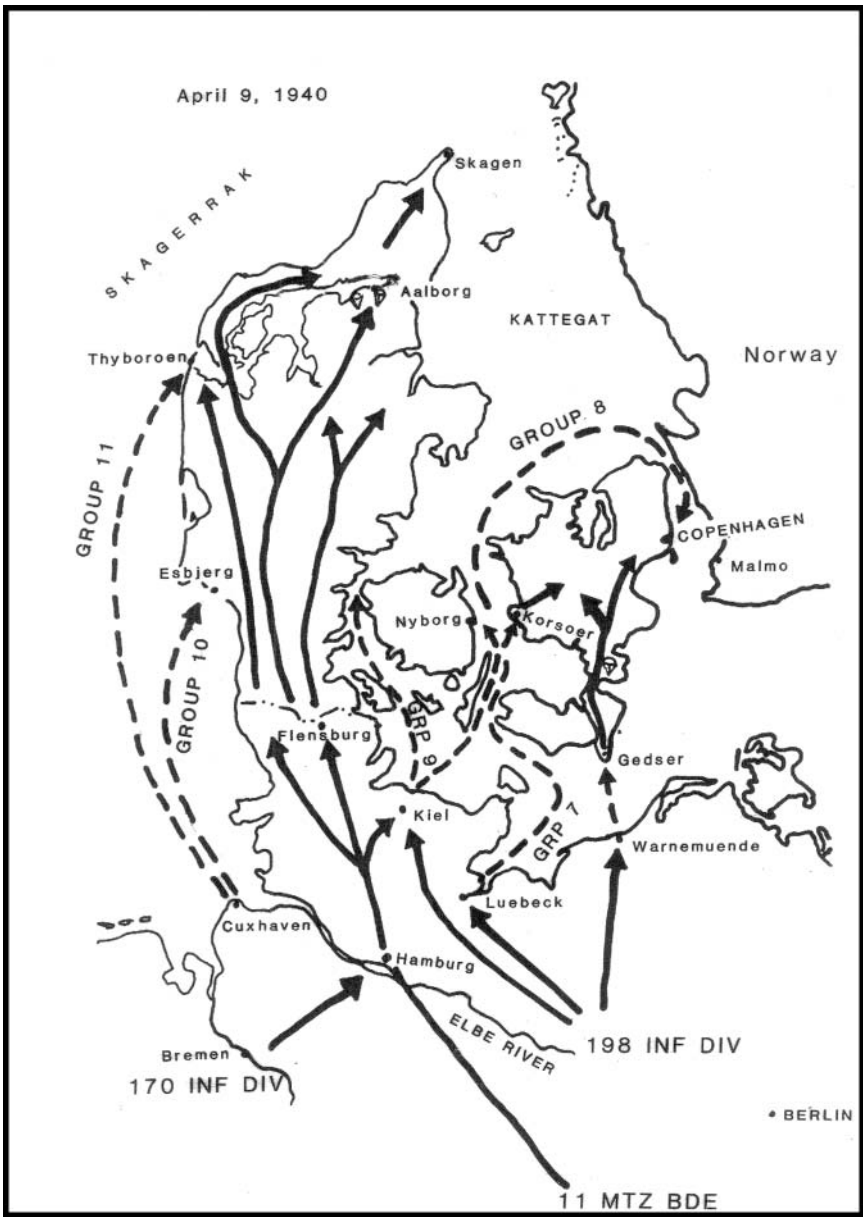

Figure 17.2
The Conquest of Norway

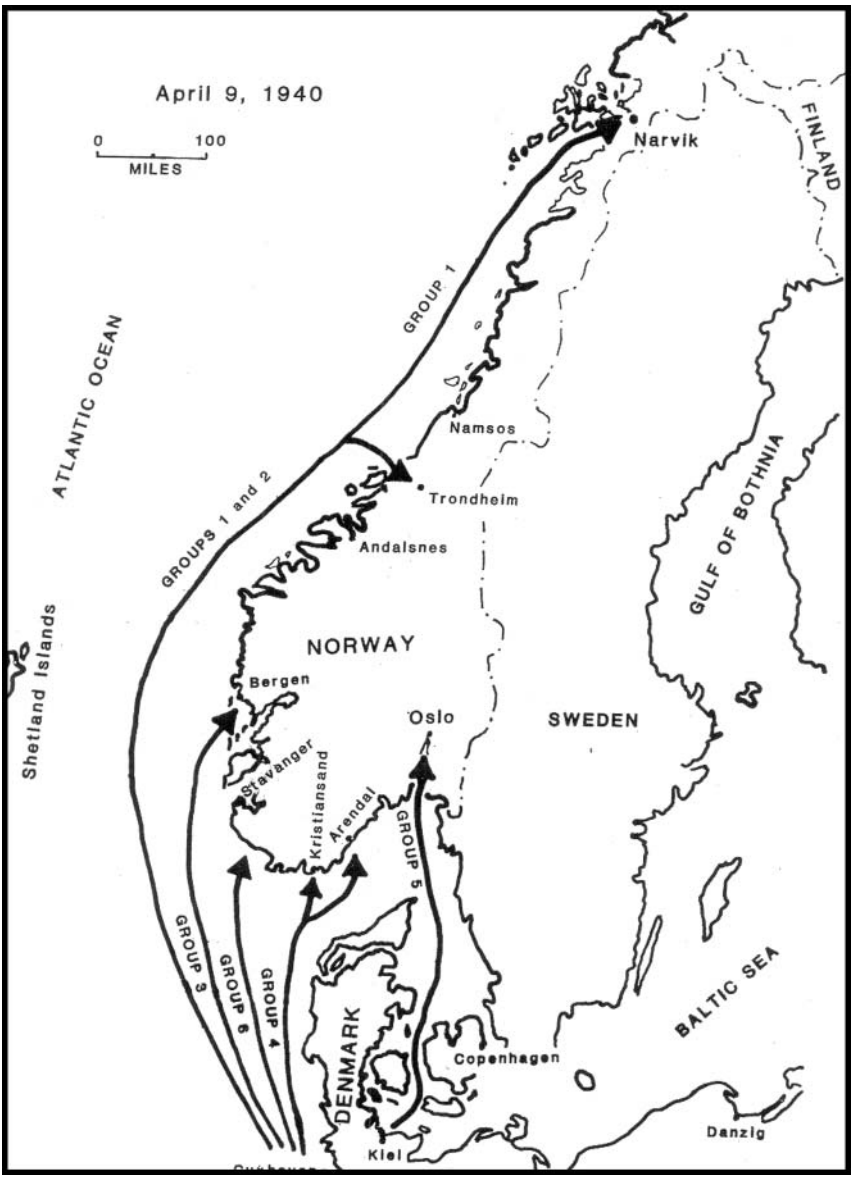

Table 17.2
Naval Echelons Employed in Operation Wereruebung

Naval Group 1 (Narvik): the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* with 10 destroyers. 2,000 troops.
Naval Group 2 (Trondheim): the cruiser *Hipper* and 4 destroyers. 1,700 troops.
Naval Group 3 (Bergen): the cruisers *Koeln* and *Koenigsberg*, 2 service ships, and 10 torpedo boats. 1,100 troops.
Naval Group 4 (Kristiansand-Arendal): the cruiser *Karlsruhe*, 1 service ship, and 10 torpedo boats. 1,100 troops.
Naval Group 5 (Oslo): the cruisers *Bluecher, Luetzow*, and *Emden*, 3 torpedo boats, 2 armed whaling bats, and 8 minesweepers. 2,000 troops.
Naval Group 6 (Egersund): 4 minesweepers. 150 troops.
Naval Group 7 (Korsoer and Nyborg): 2,000 troops.
Naval Group 8 (Copenhagen): 1,000 troops.
Naval Group 9 (Middelfart): 400 troops.
Naval Group 10 (Esbjerg): about 100 troops.
Naval Group 11 (Tyboroen): about 100 troops.
Tanker Echelon: 8 tankers (2 bound for Narvik, 1 for Trondheim, and others for Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger, and Kristiansand.
Export Echelon: 7 ships (3 bound for Narvik, 3 for Trondheim, and 1 for Stavanger).
1st Sea Transport Echelon (to land at Oslo, Kristiansand, Bergen, and Stavanger): 15 ships, scheduled to arrive on W Day.
2nd Sea Transport Echelon (Oslo): 11 ships, to dock on W +2 days.
3rd Sea Transport Echelon (Oslo): 13 ships, to dock on W + 6 days.
4th through 8th Sea Transport Echelons: to dock at Oslo between W + 8 and W + 12 days, using the same ships employed in the first three echelons.

Note:
Naval Group 7 included the World War I battleship *Schleswig-Holstein*, which had the mission of providing artillery support for the landing at Korsoer. Naval Groups 7 through 11 consisted of miscellaneous minesweepers, merchant ships, submarine chasers, tugs, and other ships and boats.
Sources:
Earl F. Ziemke, ''The Great Northern Theater of Operations, 1940–1945,'' United States Department of the Army Pamphlet #20–271 (1959), pp. 27–28.

would carry the bulk of the heavy equipment for the initial assault forces. Disguised as ordinary merchant cargo vessels, they were to put in to Norwegian ports before the invasion began.

Since the destroyers heading for Narvik and Trondheim would exhaust their fuel before they could return, a Tanker Echelon was created to refuel all of the major vessels. Two of these tankers were to dock at Narvik and one at Trondheim before W Day; the rest were to arrive at their assigned stations on W Day. Table 17.2 shows the Order of Battle of the naval forces employed in Weseruebung, as well as the designations of the various warships and transport echelons.

Hitler approved the plan and ended the review with a short speech, in which he justified his actions and stated that the nervous strain associated with this operation had been the worst he had ever endured. The next day he designated 5:15 A.M. on April 9 as ''Weser Time'': the day and time the invasions would commence.

It is ironic that Winston Churchill, then the First Sea Lord, and Erich Raeder, the Grand Admiral of the German Navy, had the same objective in mind in early 1940: to launch an invasion of neutral Norway as rapidly as possible. Churchill acquired a new ally on March 20, when the Daladier government fell and Paul Reynaud became premier of France the following day. Reynaud, who was committed to a more aggressive prosecution of the war, revived Churchill's old idea concerning Allied intervention in Norway and insisted that it be executed. The plan consisted of two separate but related operations. First, Operation Wilfred would commence. This involved the laying of two minefields in Norwegian waters, to cut off the German iron ore supply. When the Germans reacted, as expected, the Allies would institute Plan R 4—the occupation of Narvik and the railroad to the Swedish border. According to the plan, the first British battalion, escorted by two cruisers, would sail for Narvik within a few hours after the mines were laid. Trondheim and Bergen would also be occupied, and Stavanger seized temporarily, until its Sola Airfield could be destroyed. Allied action in Norway was delayed, however, because of an Anglo-French planning dispute. As a result, by the time the British minelayers left port, the German fleet had already sailed.

Most of the German surface fleet left its bases of Wilhelmshaven, Cuxhaven, and Wesermuende on the North Sea and Stettin, Swinemuende, and Kiel on the Baltic during the night of April 6–7. Admiral Marschall was on sick leave, so Vice Admiral Guenther Luetjens, whose flag was aboard the *Gneisenau*, was in acting command. Naval Groups 1 and 2 were spotted by British reconnaissance aircraft at 9:50 A.M., but it was late afternoon before Admiral Sir Charles Forbes, the commander-in-chief of the Home Fleet, sailed from Scapa Flow with two battleships, a battle cruiser, two cruisers, and 10 destroyers. An hour later, the two cruisers and 11 destroyers left Rosyth, to rendezvous with Forbes. The Home Fleet, however, headed in the wrong direction, for Admiral Forbes thought that the Germans were attempting to break out in the Atlantic; therefore, he set a course for the northeast, leaving the central North Sea uncovered.

Heavy seas and bad weather made operations difficult for both sides from the afternoon of April 7 until the morning of the 9th. During the night of April 7–8, the German fleet was unable to maintain close formation and was badly scattered by dawn. At 9 A.M. the destroyer *Berndt von Arnim*—a straggler—met the British destroyer *Glowworm*,

which had been part of one of Churchill's minelayer task forces. A running battle began and lasted an hour and a half until the German cruiser *Admiral Hipper* (commanded by Captain Heye) joined the fight. The *Glowworm* managed to ram the cruiser on the starboard bow, just aft of the anchor—a blow that ripped away 130 feet of armored belting, as well as the starboard torpedo tubes. The *Hipper* took in 500 tons of water and developed a four-degree list; moments later the *Glowworm* exploded and went down with all but 39 hands, who were rescued by the *Hipper*. It was the only major encounter of the day. About noon, Naval Group 2, spearheaded by the *Hipper*, detached itself from the main formation and headed for Trondheim. The battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* continued northward with Naval Group l until around nightfall, when they veered off to the northwest, to provide offshore protection against the Royal Navy. Despite the poor visibility, Commodore Friedrich Bonte and his 10 destroyers continued toward Narvik, reaching the mouth of West Fjord at 9 P.M.

The British Home Fleet proceeded in a northward direction most of the day. By evening, Forbes had begun to believe that the German force in front of him might be sailing for Narvik after all; therefore, he concluded, other German forces were probably at sea to the south, so he divided his forces at 8 P.M. After ordering a battle cruiser, a cruiser, and several destroyers to continue north, where the battle cruiser *Renown* was already steaming, he reversed directions and headed south with the main fleet.

THE FALL OF DENMARK

While the British Home Fleet was chasing the German warships in a gale in the North Atlantic, Major General Kurt Himer, the chief of staff of the XXXI Corps Command, was making the final preparations for the capture of Copenhagen. Himer arrived in Copenhagen on April 7, in civilian clothes, to covertly reconnoiter the Danish capital and prepare for the arrival of the *Hansestadt Danzig*, a camouflaged troop ship carrying I Battalion, 308th Infantry Regiment (I/308th Infantry), whose mission it was to seize the Royal Palace and the government. The battalion's commander, Major Glein, had been walking around Copenhagen in civilian clothes since April 4 and knew exactly how he intended to proceed at W Hour. He had even been shown through the Citadel, the main defensive position in Copenhagen harbor, by a Danish sergeant, and decided that the southeastern quadrant was its weak point.

Early in the morning of April 9, the German troop ship passed into Copenhagen harbor without being challenged by the Danish forts or naval patrols. It docked at Langelinie Pier, only a few blocks away from the Citadel, Amalienborg Palace (the king's residence), and the

headquarters of the Danish Army. At 4:20 A.M., an hour before dawn, after rousting Foreign Minister Munch out of his bed, German Ambassador Cecil von Renthe-Fink presented the Dane with an ultimatum from Berlin. Denmark, it declared, must submit to the ''protection'' of the German Reich. Meanwhile, small special units seized key bridges from surprised Danish border guards. Less than an hour later, at 5:15 A.M., the 11th Motorized Rifle Brigade and the 170th Infantry Division crossed the frontier on a wide front, while elements of the 198th Infantry Division, transported by Naval Groups 7, 8, and 9, landed on the key islands of the Danish Archipelago without opposition, quickly fanned out into the interior, and secured their objectives without trouble and without direction. The division commander, Major General Otto Roettig, and his staff were aboard the obsolete battleship *Schleswig- Holstein*. When it ran aground in the pre-dawn darkness, the rest of the convoy left it behind.

At 7:30 A.M., a parachute company ''hit the silk'' and seized the airfields at Aalborg, on the tip of the Jutland peninsula, and was rapidly reinforced by an air transported battalion of the 69th Infantry Division. The few Danish frontier guard posts that were able to put up token resistance were quickly overwhelmed, and the 11th Motorized and 170th Infantry were soon roaring through Jutland without opposition. In Copenhagen, Major Glein's troops stormed the Citadel, while General Himer gave a running description of the battle on radio to Hamburg, where Generals von Falkenhorst and Geisler had established a joint headquarters. Other elements of the battalion seized the palace and the army headquarters, almost without resistance. The final blow was a Luftwaffe bomber formation, which zoomed over the city, at the request of General Himer. It did not drop its bombs, but the implications were crystal clear. The Danish government surrendered at 7:20 A.M., and the Citadel fell 15 minutes later. The Wehrmacht had captured Denmark with a total loss of only 20 men killed or wounded. Thirteen Danes had been killed and 23 wounded.

General Himer and Ambassador von Renthe-Fink met with the 70-year-old King Christian X at 2 P.M. that same afternoon. Although still in a state of shock, the king hit it off well with the general, who expressed regret at the duties he had had to perform and allowed the monarch to retain his personal bodyguard. It was the beginning of a period of cooperation between the Danes and their conquerors that only ended when the war turned decisively against the Reich and the brutality of the Gestapo alienated the Danes, as it eventually alienated most of the peoples subjected to Nazi rule. For the next few years, however, the Danes were allowed to keep their institutions, governments, monarchy, courts, and even their newspapers. Not even their small Jewish population was molested. Yet.

THE FALL OF THE NORWEGIAN CITIES

Naval Group 1 entered Ofot Fjord at 4 A.M. and began its final approach to Narvik. Forty minutes later German assault groups, covered by destroyers, landed to capture what they thought were the coastal forts at Ramnes and Havnes. At the head of the fjord, three destroyers turned northeast, up the Herjangs Fjord, to capture the Norwegian Army depot at Elvegaardsmoen, while three other destroyers proceeded on to Narvik. Here the Norwegian naval commander, who only had two ancient ironclads (the *Eidsvold* and *Norge*) at his disposal, put up a futile resistance. The *Eidsvold* was quickly sunk by a torpedo salvo, while the *Norge* opened fire on the *Berndt von Arnim*. The ironclad was no match for the modern German destroyer and was quickly sunk. Almost all of the 300 Norwegian sailors on the two vessels were killed in the attacks.

The German infantry landed without further interference. Major General Eduard Dietl, the commander of the 3rd Mountain Division, landed with the first troops and demanded that the Norwegian garrison surrender immediately. The commandant of Narvik, a Quisling supporter, capitulated without firing a shot. By 8 A.M., Narvik was in German hands.

Despite the successful coup, the German position at Narvik was precarious. The Norwegian positions at Ramnes and Havnes, which the Abwehr had reported as ''forts,'' where, in fact, unfinished blockhouses, which had no defensive value whatsoever. Dietl had planned to use these installations to deny the Royal Navy entrance to Ofot Fjord. Worse still, only one ship of the Export and Tanker Echelons had arrived in Narvik. All of the rest had been sunk by the Royal Navy, except for one, which put in at Bergen. Dietl had lost virtually all of his artillery, vehicles, and heavy equipment, and most of his supplies. Commodore Bonte was also in serious trouble. His 10 destroyers were almost out of fuel. Without the tankers, they would be forced to remain in Narvik harbor—sitting ducks for the British.

Elsewhere, Naval Group 2, which carried Colonel Wilhelm Weiss's 138th Mountain Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Mountain Division and was spearheaded by the *Hipper*, captured Trondheim at 5:30 A.M. The other task forces captured Egersund, Stavanger, and Arendal with little difficulty, and, although Kristiansand held out until afternoon, it fell with few German losses. The Wehrmacht experienced major problems only in capturing Bergen and Oslo.

At Bergen, alert Norwegian gunners hit the *Koenigsberg* three times, causing serious damage. German landing force (elements of the 69th Infantry Division, personally led by Major General Hermann Tittel) quickly secured the city, but the *Koenigsberg* was not fit to put to sea as

planned. It was in an extremely dangerous position: Bergen was less than nine hours' sailing time from Scapa Flow and was within easy range of the Royal Air Force. That afternoon, 15 British dive-bombers attacked the trapped cruiser, but failed to score any hits. For the Germans, however, the major disaster occurred at Oslo.

Naval Group 5 entered Oslo Fjord shortly after midnight on April 9. Landing parties seized the Norwegian fortifications and the naval base at Horten, while the German warships sank several small patrol boats and torpedo boats before advancing up the fjord in formation. At 4:40 A.M., the ships reached the Droebak Narrows, about 10 miles south of Oslo.

The Narrows were protected by the fort of Oscarsborg, which had been built during the Crimean War. It was armed with obsolete Krupp 280-millimeter guns, which had been manufactured in 1905, and with torpedoes produced at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, when the leading German ship, the modern, 10,000-ton heavy cruiser *Bluecher*, came within range, the fort opened up, as did batteries at Kaholm and Droebak. The Norwegians scored several hits, causing severe damage and putting the steering gear out of action. The *Bluecher* managed to run the batteries by steering with her engines, despite suffering two more torpedo hits. The crew could not bring the fires under control, however, and they reached a magazine, which exploded at 7 A.M. The commander promptly gave the order to abandon ship, and the heavy cruiser capsized and sank a half an hour later. Most of the headquarters staff of the 163rd Infantry Division went down with the ship or drowned trying to reach land, as did 1,600 infantrymen and sailors, and the Gestapo staff assigned to arrest the king and take over the administration of the country. The divisional commander, Major General Erwin Engelbrecht, and Rear Admiral Oskar Kummetz, the commander of Naval Group 5, managed to reach shore, where they were captured by the Norwegians.

With Admiral Kummetz missing, command of the naval group devolved on August Thiele, the captain of the *Luetzow*, who proceeded in a more systematic manner. He withdrew to the south, landed troops at Sonsbukten, and attacked the defenders from land and sea, with the support of bombers and dive-bombers. The last Norwegian pocket of resistance surrendered on the morning of the 10th, after which the flotilla passed through the Narrows and reached Oslo at 11:45 A.M. Meanwhile, the city had already fallen.

The planned parachute and air landing attack on Oslo, set for the morning of April 9, had been cancelled due to heavy fog. Because of the poor visibility, X Air Corps ordered all planes to land at Aalborg, Denmark. One of the transport commanders, however, was already over Norway, and decided to ignore this order. He landed at Fornebu, near Oslo, at 8:38 A.M., to find the Norwegians in such disarray that

there was no resistance, so he off-loaded a small battalion (two companies) from the 163rd Infantry Division. The Norwegian government and royal family, along with virtually the entire parliament, were already heading for Hamar, 80 miles to the north. They did not forget to take the gold from the Bank of Norway with them, but they did nothing to block or defend a major airfield, which was taken by unarmed transport aircraft. By noon, five more infantry companies and two paratrooper companies had joined the original battalion. This little command easily could have been crushed by the Norwegian forces in the capital; however, these forces were without leadership and received no orders whatsoever. Sensing the enemy confusion, Lieutenant Colonel Pohlman (Falkenhorst's operations officer who had arrived in Oslo the day before, carrying a message to the German embassy) assembled an ad hoc military band and boldly marched into the capital of Norway, which surrendered to that daring but motley crew that afternoon.

As their capital fell, the Norwegian parliament met at Hamar, where, to the great relief of very few, it was determined that only five of its more than 200 members were missing.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian Army, which had been the victim of years of parliamentary neglect, rallied and put up a better resistance that anyone had any right to expect. It had a peacetime strength of 19,000 men, divided into six divisions. Despite the threat of an unavoidable conflict, as clearly demonstrated by the Russo-Finnish War, the Norwegian Army—which was hamstrung by its parliament—had no tanks or antitank weapons of any kind, and had only 41 combat aircraft.

Since the government had failed to order a mobilization or provide anything remotely resembling leadership, the determination displayed by the remnants of the Norwegian Army throughout the country was little short of amazing. A major reason for this spirited resistance was Vidkum Quisling, who, without prior German knowledge or permission, waltzed into an Oslo radio station and proclaimed himself the new ruler of Norway. This act of treachery spurred the Norwegians into a virtually unanimous will to oppose the invaders, for they were all united in their hatred for Quisling. Shortly after he landed, it was clear to General von Falkenhorst that he was facing greater resistance than had been anticipated, and that he was going to have to proceed more slowly than the Weseruebung plan envisioned in linking up with his forces at Bergen, Stavanger, Kristiansand, Trondheim, and Narvik. His first order of business was to establish a base at Oslo; only then would he begin the systematic conquest of Norway. Because his forces at Oslo were still weak, he awaited the arrival of the 1st and 2nd Sea Transport Echelons, which were carrying the bulk of the 163rd and 196th Infantry Divisions from Germany. He would not venture out of the capital until then.

On April 9, the five destroyers of the British 2nd Destroyer Flotilla (Captain Bernard A. W. Warburton-Lee) launched a bold raid against Narvik. Taking advantage of a snowstorm, it steamed up Ofot Fjord into the Narvik harbor, where it surprised five German destroyers, sinking two and severely damaging the other three. Commodore Bonte was among those killed in action. Passing out of the fjord, however, the British task force was itself surprised by the other five German destroyers of Naval Group l, led by Captain Erich Bey, who had anchored in the Herjangs and Ballangen Fjords. In the ensuing battle, one British destroyer was sunk, another forced to beach, and a third badly shot up. (Captain Warburton-Lee, who was aboard the beached destroyer, was badly wounded and died shortly after being taken ashore.) The German destroyers, however, were still trapped, were almost out of fuel, and could not return home until the tankers arrived.

During the afternoon of April 12, Admiral Forbes arrived off of the Lofotens and joined forces with what was left of the 2nd Destroyer Flotilla. The following morning, a task force consisting of the British battleship *Warspite* and nine destroyers, all commanded by Vice Admiral William J. Whitworth, entered Ofot Fjord, supported by planes from the aircraft carrier *Furious*. The airplanes sank a German submarine, while the warships sank a German destroyer that had been damaged on April 9. The other seven German destroyers made a stand in Narvik harbor from 1 P.M. to 2 P.M. Then, their ammunition exhausted, they retired into Rombaks and Herjangs Fjords, where all seven were beached or sunk. Captain Bey and most of the crewmen escaped and were formed into ad hoc infantry battalions under the command of General Dietl's mountain division, which was now completely isolated.

The loss of the 10 destroyers at Narvik represented half of Germany's destroyer force and was a severe blow to the navy. (Germany had begun the war with only 22 destroyers, but two had been accidentally sunk by German airplanes in February 1940.) To the south, the other warships had at least enough fuel to attempt to make their escapes, which they did with varying degrees of success.

The *Hipper*, skillfully commanded by Captain Heye, narrowly eluded Admiral Forbes's fleet and successfully evaded attacks by 18 torpedo planes. It docked at Wilhelmshaven on April 12, with only enough fuel in its tanks to keep its engines running for another two hours. The two destroyers from Trondheim also made good on their escape. For the *Koenigsberg*, lying helpless in Bergen harbor, however, there was no escape. It suffered two direct hits by British bombers on April 10, capsized, and sank. Meanwhile, a British submarine torpedoed the *Karlsruhe* as it was leaving Kristiansand harbor on the night of April 9–10. The Germans were unable to affect repairs, and the cruiser had to be sent to the bottom by its own torpedo boat escorts.

The *Luetzow* put to sea on the evening of April 10, but was also torpedoed by a British submarine off the Swedish coast on the morning of April 11. It was kept afloat only by the incredible efforts of its crew, but it had to be towed to Kiel, as both of its screws had been shot away. The damage was so extensive that it was now useless as a warship and henceforth was used exclusively as a training vessel.

In total, the German surface fleet lost almost half its strength in the Norwegian campaign: one heavy cruiser, two light cruisers, and 10 destroyers sunk, and three other cruisers were damaged, one so severely that it was now operationally useless.

Of the seven ships of the Export Echelon, four were sunk en route, one was sunk while being unloaded, and one was captured. Only one survived. Most of the Tanker Echelon were also lost, but the sea transport echelons only lost six ships during the first stage of the invasion. By June 15, the navy had transported more than 110,000 men to Norway, as well as more than 16,000 horses, 20,000 vehicles, and 110,000 tons of supplies. Over the same period, the 582 aircraft from the Luftwaffe transport units (mostly Ju-52s) flew more than 13,000 missions and carried almost 30,000 men and 2,400 tons of supplies to Norway, including some critical mountain artillery batteries.

The navy would have been much more successful in Norway if its torpedoes had worked. Over the objections of Admiral Doenitz, the U-boat fleet had been taken off of patrol duty in the North Atlantic and had been assigned the task of protecting the German warships from British attack.[4] They had done what they had been ordered to do; torpedo after torpedo had slammed into British vessels, but without effect. At Narvik, on April 13, for example, the *Warspite* and several of the destroyers had been struck by torpedoes from at least three different U-boats, but not one exploded. This was not the first incident of German torpedo failure. It will be recalled that, at Scapa Flow in October 1939, four of the seven ''tin fish'' fired by Lieutenant Prien had failed to explode. Later that month, Lieutenant Herbert Schulze of *U-48* returned from patrol and reported that five torpedo failures—a piece of data that was obscured by the fact that he had sunk five ships. That same month, however, Lieutenant Victor Schuetze of *U-25* had halted a steamer, ordered its crew off, and fired four torpedoes into it at close range—each and every one a dud. On October 30, 1939, Lieutenant Wilhelm Zahn of *U-56* fired a fan of three torpedoes into the British battleship *Nelson* at a range of only 800 meters, but all three failed to explode. Passengers on this ship included Winston Churchill, Admiral Forbes, and the First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, among others.

By early November 1939, Doenitz reported to OKM that at least 30 percent of his torpedoes were duds, but nothing was done about the problem. It was not until Naval Group 1 had been wiped out and

Doenitz withdrew the entire submarine force from the battle, on the grounds that its main weapon did not work, that Admiral Raeder belatedly appointed a special commission to investigate the ''torpedo crisis.'' The investigators uncovered a major scandal. It was discovered that the percussion pistol in the German *Aufschlagzuendung* (AZ, or percussion-detonating device) had been test-fired only twice (in 1928), before the Torpedo Experimental Institute labeled it ''indispensable''; then, without further testing, it was incorporated into all German torpedoes. The magnetically operated detonating device on the torpedoes had been developed, tested, and adopted with a similar lack of thoroughness. It, too, had failed in combat. Finally, it was revealed that Vice Admiral Friedrich Goetting, the chief of the Torpedo Inspectorate at OKM, had twice warned Grand Admiral Raeder that the torpedoes were defective, in writing, and before the outbreak of the war. Commodore Bonte and his men had paid the price for this neglect at Narvik.

Eventually, Rear Admiral Oskar Wehr, the former head of the Torpedo Testing Institute, was court-martialed for dereliction of duty and was sentenced to six months of fortress confinement at Germersheim. Many people in the navy thought that Admiral Raeder and his staff should have been called to account for ignoring Admiral Goetting's warnings and neglecting their duty, but no such action was ever taken.

THE CONQUEST OF SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL NORWAY

By April 12, it was clear that Weseruebung had failed to achieve one of its primary objectives: the quick surrender of Norway. Group XXI in Oslo, therefore, now had the task of conquering the interior, so that it could establish its lines of communications and prepare for an advance to Narvik, to relieve the mountain troops isolated there. Falkenhorst accomplished this task in a calm, systematic manner, like the General Staff officer he was.

The first step was the systematic buildup of forces. These included the bulk of the 163rd and 196th Infantry Divisions, the 40th Panzer Battalion, three machine gun battalions, and a motorized battalion of the Regiment ''General Goering.'' By April 14, the area around Oslo was secure, and Group XXI was advancing toward the entrances of the Oesterdal and Gudbrandsdal valleys: positions that had to be taken before the group could link up with the 138th Mountain Infantry Regiment at Trondheim.

Meanwhile, spurred on by Churchill, the Allies were already landing in Norway.

Initially, they toyed with the idea of launching a direct attack on Trondheim, but eventually adopted the less risky course of an envelopment of the city from the north and south. On April 14, the first British forces landed at Namsos, 80 miles northeast of Trondheim, followed

two days later by an entire brigade. On April 19, a small French brigade (three battalions) joined them. Another British brigade landed at Andalsnes, 100 miles southwest of Trondheim, on April 18, and by the 19th, the Allies had 8,000 men ashore in Norway.

Back in Berlin, the Allied landings and the loss of the 10 destroyers at Narvik threw Hitler into a terrible state of nervous agitation. On April 14, he told General von Brauchitsch that Narvik could not be held and suggested that Dietl be ordered to give up the city and withdraw to the south, possibly into internment in Sweden. Two days later, he insisted that the mountaineers either be withdrawn into Sweden or evacuated by air. Alfred Jodl, however, stood up to the irrational dictator. He pointed out that a march to the south was impossible, and that the loss of aircraft would be high. He managed to calm the distraught Fuehrer by pointing out that Dietl had not yet even been attacked and convinced him to postpone a decision. The following day, however, there was another outbreak of irrationality, this one bordering on panic. Without consulting OKW or OKH about the actual military situation, Hitler started screaming orders that Dietl withdraw to the south, into Sweden if necessary. ''The hysteria is frightful,'' Jodl recorded in his diary.[5] Keitel obediently drafted a coded order to Dietl, instructing him to carry out the Fuehrer's wishes. He handed it to Lieutenant Colonel Bernhard von Lossberg, a member of the OKW planning staff, who angrily refused to transmit it to Narvik. He went off to see the commander-in-chief of the army, while Jodl confronted Hitler directly. Pounding the table with his fist, the chief of operations of the OKW informed Hitler in language he could understand that the position was not lost and should not be passively abandoned. The general's firmness took the Fuehrer aback and rationality temporarily returned to the Reichschancellery. That evening, under pressure from Jodl, Hitler sent an order to Narvik, instructing Dietl to hold the city for as long as possible. Meanwhile, at the urging of Colonel von Lossberg, Brauchitsch sent a message to Eduard Dietl, congratulating him on his promotion to lieutenant general and saying that he was sure he would defend his position ''to the last.''[6] Lossberg then returned to Jodl's office and tore up Keitel's order before his eyes.

This crisis of nerves was a precursor of things to come. Despite his repeated claims that he had nerves of steel, Hitler was, in fact, subject to frequent fits of nervous agitation and panic, often accompanied by rage. The next such display occurred on April 21, when the Allied threat against Trondheim, coupled with the slowness of the advance from Oslo, led to another bout of nervous tension. This time, however, the Fuehrer was more rational and only ordered that the 2nd Mountain Division be transferred to Norway, instead of the 11th Motorized Brigade. Given weather conditions in Norway and the state of the

Norwegian roads, this order actually would have been a rational military act, had he not messed it up the next day by proposing that the division be transported directly to Trondheim, using the liners *Bremen* and *Europa*. Admiral Raeder talked him out of this rash move by pointing out that it would take the entire fleet to escort these ships through the heart of the Royal Navy; even then, he said, they would probably lose both the liners and the fleet. In the end, the 2nd Mountain was shipped to Oslo, using conventional transports.

Meanwhile, back in Norway, the calm at Falkenhorst's headquarters stood in direct contrast to the panic at Hitler's. The veteran general of infantry reinforced the 196th Infantry Division to a strength of more than four regiments, divided it into two columns, and sent one into the Gudbrandsdal, the other into the Oesterdal. The northern column, which advanced through the Oesterdal, was led by Colonel Hermann Fischer, the commander of the 340th Infantry Regiment. Major General Richard Pellengahr, the commanding general of the 196th, directed the southern (Gudbrandsdal) column.

Knowing that the Germans could not maneuver off of the roads, the Norwegians based their defense on a series of barricades and roadblocks, supported by fire from the higher ground on the flanks. The Germans countered by placing one or two tanks in the spearhead of each column, followed in order by two trucks carrying combat engineers, an infantry company, a platoon of artillery, a second infantry company (as a relief force), and replacement engineers and artillery. By launching immediate attacks when roadblocks were encountered, the Germans were able to pin down the defenders on the barricades and then smash them.

The unexpected success of the German advance forced the British to divert their 148th Infantry Brigade from the assault on Trondheim to the Gudbrandsdal Valley, where it clashed with the Germans at Tretten on April 23. The Battle of Tretten was the first time in World War II that British and German forces met in ground combat, and it was a disaster for the British. Their anti-tank rifles could not penetrate the German tanks (obsolete PzKw Is and IIs), which broke through the main British line and cut off the forward units. A battalion commander and a large number of soldiers were taken prisoner, and the 148th had to be withdrawn 45 miles, to one of the tributary valleys of the Gudbrandsdal.

In light of the rapid progress Pellengahr and Fischer were making, General von Falkenhorst no longer saw a need to concentrate his efforts on reaching Trondheim; rather, he ordered his forces to pursue the enemy without respite and to destroy their ground forces before they could establish a viable defensive line. He was supported in this effort by the aviation combat units of the Luftwaffe, which were now

under the command of the 5th Air Fleet, a headquarters that was activated on April 12. At the moment, it was under the command of Erhard Milch, who felt he needed such an assignment on his record to win his Knight's Cross and to continue his ruthless career advancement. Milch had had no desire to leave Germany, however, and had originally headquartered at Hamburg. He only went to Norway after Hermann Goering gave him direct orders to do so; nevertheless, one must admit that the aerial support the army's combat forces received was superb, and that Falkenhorst had no grounds to complain about the Luftwaffe on that score, even if its leaders did continue to intrigue and conspire against him behind the scenes.

After the Battle of Tretten, the Luftwaffe bombed Andalsnes and the subsidiary port of Molde on April 26, rendering both practically useless. Meanwhile, General Pellengahr pressed his advantage and trapped the bulk of the 2nd Norwegian Division at Gausdal. On April 29, 250 officers and 3,500 men surrendered. The campaign in central Norway was coming unraveled, insofar as the Allies were concerned, so they began to evacuate Andalsnes on the night of April 29–30. Pellengahr tried to cut off their retreat but was delayed by destroyed bridges west of the city, which forced his men to continue the pursuit on foot. They arrived in Andalsnes on the afternoon of May 2, several hours after the last British battalion sailed away.

To meet the British threat against Trondheim, Falkenhorst had most of the 181st Infantry Division transported to Trondheim by air. While Major General Kurt Woytasch organized his units in the Trondheim sector, the Allies disembarked at Namsos. By April 30, the Allies had 6,000 Anglo-French troops and an estimated 6,000 Norwegians, against Woytasch's 9,500 men.[7] The Germans, however, had the priceless asset of air superiority, and they used it to blast Allied positions, assembly areas, and supply lines. They also flattened Namsos, and Woytasch defeated the British at Verdalsoera in a blinding snowstorm. The Allies retreated to the north and hastily evacuated Namsos, with the last troops leaving before day broke on May 3. The Germans reached the town at 5:30 P.M. on May 4, and, that night, accepted the surrender of the 5th Norwegian Brigade (2,050 officers and men).

Meanwhile, lacking central direction and organization, Norwegian resistance south of Trondheim collapsed everywhere, and the remnants of the Norwegian Army were mopped up by the 69th and 214th Infantry Divisions. After a gallant struggle, the Norwegian 4th Brigade (3,500 men) was forced to surrender to the 69th Infantry Division near Lommen on May 1. This left only one German position in danger: the port of Narvik. However, this was a vital position. Without it, the German iron ore supplies from Sweden would be cut, and the German war economy crippled. ''Narvik,'' Ziemke adeptly stated, ''was the grand

prize of the Norwegian campaign.... For the Germans to take the rest of Norway and lose Narvik was, in effect, to lose the campaign.''[8]

THE BATTLES FOR NARVIK

After the Royal Navy sank the last of the German destroyers, General Dietl was isolated in northern Norway with the Headquarters, 3rd Mountain Division, the 139th Mountain Infantry Regiment, and very little else. He quickly incorporated the 2,600 sailors who had survived the naval actions into ad hoc infantry battalions, bringing his total strength to 4,600 men. Dietl armed the sailors with Norwegian supplies, taken from the captured depot at Elvegaardsmoen. Leaving the sailors and untrained infantry to coastal defense duties in and near Narvik, he secured the railroad as far as the Swedish border by April 16 with his mountain troops, against light Norwegian resistance. He then established his main supply base at Bjoernfjell (about two miles from the border). On April 14, a flight of 10 Ju-52s landed on the ice of Hartvig Lake, bringing him supplies and a battery of mountain artillery; four days later, however, Hitler ordered that no new forces be committed to Narvik.

The British, of course, recognized the value of Narvik and, on April 24, tried to induce a surrender by means of a naval bombardment. The prosperous and modern winter resort city of Narvik was shelled for three hours on April 24 by a battleship, two cruisers, and six destroyers. When it did not surrender, the British established a base at Harstad on Hinnoey Island, which was already the headquarters of the 6th Norwegian Division. Here they were joined by three battalions of French Chasseurs Alpins. By the end of April, the Allies had 11 infantry battalions, as well as several batteries of artillery. Dietl faced them with the I and III Battalions of the 139th Mountain Infantry Regiment on line and with the II Battalion and the ad hoc naval force in reserve.

The Allied offensive began on April 28. Due to the snow and rugged terrain the advance was slow, but, by May 6, Dietl's position was critical. Meanwhile, the Allies had received further reinforcements, in the form of a Polish brigade (four battalions) and two battalions from the French Foreign Legion. The mountain troops fought tenaciously, but they could not prevent a second Allied landing at Bjerkvik, in the rear of the I/139th Mountain, on the night of May 12–13. Dietl had anticipated just such an attack but only had a naval battalion to commit against it, and—much to his disgust—this unit quickly fled, abandoning most of its machine guns in the process. A small detachment of mountain troops managed to slow the advance of the landing party (two battalions of Foreign Legionaires), but it could not prevent them

from retaking the Norwegian Army supply base of Elvegaardsmoen. By the end of the day, the Legionaires had routed another naval company and had taken Oyjord, directly across Rombaken Fjord from Narvik.

On the evening of May 13, Group XXI signaled Berlin that the situation of Group Dietl was critical. It had started the forward elements of Lieutenant General Valentin Feurstein's 2nd Mountain Division on the long march northward from Trondheim on May 4. They had already covered 260 miles, but were still 180 miles away, and the last 80 miles was a trackless wilderness. Group XXI could do little except call for parachute units, which could be air dropped in the Narvik sector. By this time, however, almost all of Germany's parachute, air landing, and glider units had been committed to the fighting in the West (see Chapter XIX), so all Falkenhorst could send Dietl was a battalion of paratroopers, plus two companies of mountain infantry, which were given a brief training course in parachuting before they were dropped. These reinforcements totaled about 1,000 men. By now, British Lieutenant General C. J. E. Auchinleck, the Allied commander, had 25,000 men.

The end of the Norwegian campaign was somewhat anti-climatic. On May 24, because of the disastrous situation in France and Belgium, the Allied Supreme Command in London decided to abandon operations in Norway. They did decide to take Narvik first, however, since they were so close and this would provide the best evacuation port available for General Auchinleck's forces. The offensive began at 11:40 P.M., May 27. At midnight, two battalions of the Foreign Legion and a Norwegian battalion, supported by fighter aircraft and fire from several warships, crossed Rombaks Fjord and landed just northeast of Narvik. Simultaneously, three Polish battalions landed at Ankenes, less than three miles south of the city. The troops of the II/139th Mountain Regiment launched a counterattack and drove the Legionaries back, almost to their beaches. This enabled the supply units, support troops, and sailors in Narvik to escape to the east, but the city itself fell on the morning of May 28.

General Dietl reestablished his line the next day. It was very thin, and extended in an arch, about 15 miles in length, with its back literally against the Swedish frontier. By now, Dietl's supply situation was also critical. Hitler was again seized by fear and ordered OKL to make strong elements of the 7th Air Division available for the relief of Group Dietl. The Allies, however, were more concerned with the evacuation of their ground forces. This they accomplished with considerable skill. Narvik was evacuated on June 7, but Dietl's men, who were preparing for a last-ditch defense, did not know it until the evening of June 8. The Germans quickly reoccupied the city and soon learned that the

Allied base at Harstad had also been evacuated. The last ship had left on the morning of June 8. The following day, General Otto Ruge surrendered the remnants of the Norwegian Army to Group Dietl, ending the ground fighting in Norway. [9]

Meanwhile, in mid-May, Admiral Raeder informed Hitler that the *Scharnhorst* and *Hipper* would be repaired and ready for new missions on May 27, and that the *Gneisenau* would be combat ready shortly thereafter. He asked for and received permission to commit them in the area between Norway and the Shetland Islands, to attack Allied supply convoys, which were, naturally, protected by the Royal Navy.

Raeder's real motive for launching this new operation was probably closely connected with the deteriorating Allied military situation in France and Belgium. Raeder thought that the war would soon be over, and he wanted to prove the value of the navy, no doubt with an eye toward assuring the Fuehrer's support for its postwar development. In any case, the warships sailed out of Kiel on June 4, under the direction of Admiral Wilhelm Marschall, the fleet commander. Marschall had the dual mission of supporting the advance of Feurstein's 2nd Mountain Division on Narvik and attacking the British warships and transports in the Harstad sector. Raeder, however, refused to assign priorities for these two missions; instead, he gave them equal priority.

Admiral Marschall had a formidable task force, including the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, the heavy cruiser *Hipper*, four destroyers, and a naval tanker. He did not, however, know what he was expected to do. His immediate commander at Naval Group West, Generaladmiral Alfred Saalwaechter, sent him specific instructions, but the confusion was compounded when Raeder's chief of staff at SKL, Admiral Otto Schniewind, sent a dispatch informing Marschall that the Supreme Naval Staff's orders contained no such precise directions. Schniewind did not, however, specifically revoke Saalwaechter's orders. This type of vagueness was typical of the confusion that fleet and task force commanders had to deal with when operating under the command of Grand Admiral Raeder.

On the night of June 7, Admiral Marschall received an aerial reconnaissance report indicating that three naval convoys had left Narvik. He correctly concluded that the British were evacuating and signaled that he intended to attack these valuable prizes. Raeder, however, did not agree and signaled back at 5 A.M. on June 8 that Marschall' s primary mission was still (?!) to strike at Harstad.

Marschall had, in fact, stumbled right across the main line of the British retreat, and they did not yet know he was there. Furious at the meddling of his superiors, Marschall took matters into his own hands and went out searching for convoys. The battleships did not find any, but the *Hipper* sank an escort trawler, a Norwegian tanker, and a

20,000-ton troopship (which was empty, except for some German prisoners). Meanwhile, about 1 P.M., he dispatched his destroyers to assist Feurstein, as ordered by Adolf Hitler. Then, heading north with his battleships, Marschall intercepted radio signals that gave away the locations of the aircraft carriers *Ark Royal* and *Glorious*, as well as the cruiser *Southampton*.

Marschall found the 22,500-ton *Glorious* at 5:10 P.M. and the *Scharnhorst* opened up on her from 15 miles away. The big guns of the *Gneisenau* also opened up on the *Glorious*, while her mediums engaged the British destroyer *Ardent*. The *Glorious* tried to escape, but went down at 7 P.M. Only 43 British servicemen survived out of the more than 1,500 on board. Meanwhile, the *Ardent* also went down, and the British destroyer *Acasta*, which had also joined the battle, was a burning wreck.

About 7 P.M., the *Acasta* fired four torpedoes at an extreme range of 14 kilometers (8.7 miles). Nine minutes later, one of these torpedoes struck the *Scharnhorst*, ripping a 12- by 4-meter hole in its side—a very lucky shot. A few minutes later, the *Acasta* disappeared beneath the ocean. Only one of its crewmen survived.

The *Acasta*'s lucky shot saved a great many British lives, for Admiral Marschall now had to break off the pursuit. Several hours later, the *Scharnhorst* limped into Trondheim for repairs.

Admiral Marschall had won a significant victory for the German Navy, even though it had not been one-sided. Had he been left to his own judgment, instead of being hamstrung by conflicting and contradictory orders, he might have scored the biggest German naval victory of the war. Admiral Raeder, however, bitterly denounced Marschall for failing to achieve an even greater triumph. He did not make these criticisms to the fleet commander's face, however, nor through official channels; rather, he voiced them to third parties, where he was sure they would reach Marschall's ears, but always unofficially. Even so, Raeder ordered Marschall to make another foray into the North Atlantic. This the fleet commander refused to do, because the surface fleet had been decimated during Raeder's Norwegian adventure, and Marschall felt strongly that Germany should conserve its few remaining capital ships. This attitude elicited new (but still unofficial) scorn from Berlin.

On June 18, Wilhelm Marschall asked to be relieved of his command on the grounds of illness, and Grand Admiral Raeder quickly replaced him with Vice Admiral Guenther Luetjens, a pliable man who was more to his liking. Marschall also demanded a court of inquiry be assembled to examine his conduct during Operation Juno, as the fleet foray was called. Admiral Raeder refused to allow this, despite repeated attempts by Marschall to have one convened. Germany thus lost one of its best admirals.[10]

RESULTS

The campaign in Norway cost Germany 1,317 killed, 1,604 wounded, and 2,375 missing—most of them lost at sea. The British lost 1,900 men in ground combat and more than 2,500 at sea. The Luftwaffe lost 127 aircraft, as opposed to 87 Allied planes (excluding those lost on the *Glorious*). The most significant losses came at sea, where Germany lost one heavy and two light cruisers, 10 destroyers, six submarines, and a number of smaller vessels, while a number of warships suffered varying degrees of damage. The British and their allies lost an aircraft carrier, a cruiser, an anti-aircraft cruiser, nine destroyers, and six submarines. By the end of the campaign, with the prospect of invading Great Britain looming on the horizon, the German Navy—which had only about one-eighth the strength of the Royal Navy when the campaign began—had only one heavy cruiser, two light cruisers, four destroyers, and 19 torpedo boats fit for combat duty (excluding submarines).

The Norwegian campaign was the high point of the war for the German surface fleet; it would engage in no more major fleet actions. Most of the fleet had, in fact, been destroyed.

In return for its losses, Germany gained full control of its supply line to Swedish iron ore and Finnish nickel. It acquired several new and important air and naval bases, as well as economic advantages, such as Norwegian raw materials and labor. Ironically, by the end of the campaign, Germany was already on the verge of capturing the French iron ore region of Lorraine, and thus could have avoided the Scandinavian campaign altogether; of course, there was no way the German leaders could have known this on April 9, 1940.

Perhaps most important, Weseruebung revealed two serious defects in the leadership of Adolf Hitler. First was his tendency to lose his nerve at critical moments. Second was his constant and persistent meddling in the details of operations—details that would properly have been left to his subordinates. These two characteristics, coupled with a stubbornness and mental instability that would grow over the next five years, would prove fatal to him in the end, and lethal to Nazi Germany. In 1940, however, this was mostly in the future. In fact, Hitler was on the eve of winning his greatest victory.

NOTES

1. Earl F. Ziemke, ''The German Northern Theater of Operations, 1940-1945,'' United States Department of the Army Pamphlet #20–271 (1959), p. 7 (hereafter cited as Ziemke, ''Northern Theater''). This book is by far the best account of the German operations in Norway ever written and is the primary source for this chapter.

2. In the terminology of the German Army, *Gruppe* was used to designate an intermediate unit, in this case between a corps-level and an army-level headquarters.

3. Ziemke, ''Northern Theater,'' p. 18.

4. Karl Doenitz, *Ten Years and Twenty Days* (1959) (hereafter cited as Doenitz).

5. Irving, *Hitler's War*, vol. 1, p. 110.

6. Ibid.

7. The estimated 6,000 Norwegians are a German estimate, which is probably high (Ziemke, ''Northern Theater,'' p. 87).

8. Ibid.

9. Otto Ruge (1882–1961) was the former chief of the Norwegian General Staff (1933–38). He remained in German prisoner-of-war camps until the end of the war in 1945, when he returned to Oslo as commander-in-chief of the Norwegian Army. He was named commander-in-chief of the Norwegian Armed Forces in 1946 and retired in 1948.

10. Perhaps to shut him up, Raeder recalled Marschall (1886–1976) to active duty in late August 1940, as inspector of naval education. He later held special assignments with Naval Groups South and Baltic, but he was never again given command or responsibilities commensurate with his rank—or his talent—until April 19, 1945, when he was recalled from retirement and was named Naval Commander-in-Chief West. (Marschall had retired in 1943.) He was a POW until 1947. He had earned the *Pour le Merite* as a U-boat commander in World War I.

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CHAPTER XVIII
THE MANSTEIN PLAN

CONFLICTING IDEAS

When the German assault forces hit the beaches in Norway on April 9, 1940, the planning and preparations for the invasion of France and the Benelux Countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) were already in an advanced stage.

On September 27, 1939, the day after his return from Poland, Hitler demanded that the OKH present him with a plan for the invasion of France. Since Generals von Brauchitsch and Halder were known to oppose the invasion, he allowed no discussion of it. The OKH plan, which was drafted by Halder and his staff, and presented to Hitler on October 19, was an unimaginative rehash of the Schlieffen Plan, which had failed in 1914. Christened Plan I of *Fall Gelb* (Case Yellow), it called for the employment of 95 divisions on the Western Front. Forty-two divisions, including all of the panzer and motorized infantry, were to be assigned to Fedor von Bock's Army Group B (formerly Army Group North). Its objective was to drive through the Liege Gap, overrun the Maastricht Appendix, and occupy as much of Holland and Belgium as possible. Rundstedt's Army Group A was to launch a secondary attack into southern Belgium with 23 divisions, while Army Group C (Ritter von Leeb) with 20 infantry divisions would pin down as many French divisions as it could on the Maginot Line. Ten divisions were to be kept in OKH reserve.

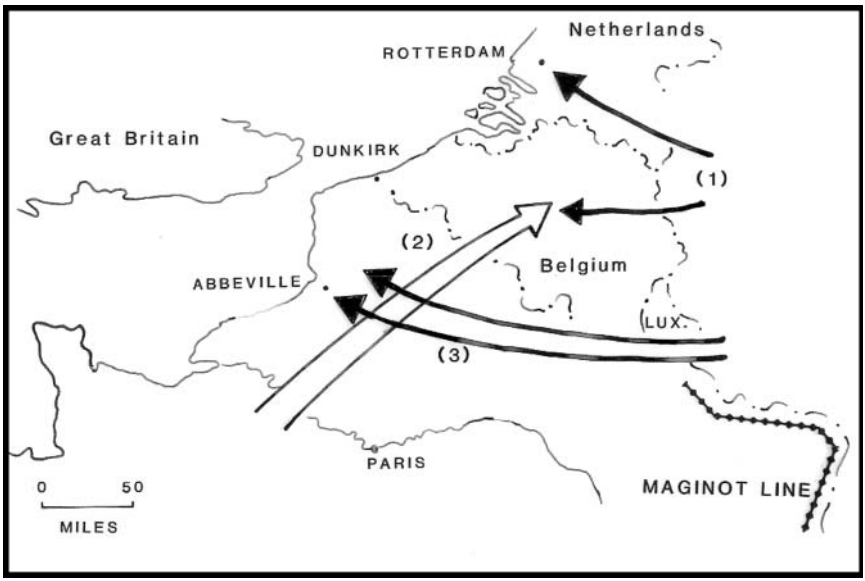
The major drawback to the plan was that it called for the German Army to do exactly what the French and British expected it to do. Had it been executed, it would have resulted in a head-on collision between the Germans and the Allies somewhere in Belgium—a blood-letting in which the Wehrmacht would have had little chance of winning a decisive victory. It was officially regarded with pessimism by all three army group commanders, as well as by List and Reichenau. Hitler was

unenthusiastic about the plan, but, since he had no alternative to offer, accepted it. He also ordered the creation of a special Abwehr battalion of 400 to 500 men, whose mission would be to dress in uniforms of the Dutch Frontier Police and, operating under the command of 6th Army, help seize the Meuse River bridges in the Maastricht enclave. After the generals expressed dismay and dislike for the idea, Hitler lamented at their lack of imagination. He declared that they should have read more Karl May as children—a reference to the popular German author of his childhood who wrote cowboy and Indian stories.[1]

General Erich von Manstein, the chief of staff of Army Group A, received a copy of Plan I on October 21, while passing through Berlin en route to his new headquarters at Coblenz (Kolbenz). Arguably the best strategic brain to come out of World War II, Manstein realized at a glance that, if this plan were put into operation, Army Group B would soon be involved in a World War I–type battle of attrition in Belgium and Holland. He realized that the Low Countries were poor terrain for tanks and that this, coupled with the preponderance of built-up areas (the military term for towns and cities) in this region, would largely negate Germany's motorized superiority. Urban areas, Manstein knew, made excellent and massive anti-tank obstacles, and the fact that the 4th Panzer Division had lost 57 of its 120 tanks in two day's fighting in Warsaw was still fresh in his memory. Soon an idea began to form in his fertile mind. This idea would gradually evolve into the Manstein Plan, a plan that would make the term *blitzkrieg* a household word and would make the German Wehrmacht the most feared military machine of its day. Would it be possible, he wondered, to launch an offensive through the Ardennes, well south of the place the Allies expected them to attack? If so, it might be possible to feint an attack through the Low Countries, get the Allies to commit their mobile reserves prematurely, and cut them off with a rapid thrust to the south, from the Ardennes to the sea. Figure 18.1 shows the Manstein Plan, in which (1) the German Army Group B launches an invasion of Belgium and the Netherlands; (2) the Allies attempt to counter it with their main motorized forces; and (3) Army Group A, the main German strike force, knives into their rear and cuts them off, forming a huge pocket east of Dunkirk. After that, the defeat of France would be a foregone conclusion.

On October 25, at a conference with von Brauchitsch, Halder, Bock, and others in the Reichschancellery, Hitler tentatively suggested the possibility of cutting off the Allies south of Namur by a thrust through the Ardennes; however, when he was told by Brauchitsch and Halder that such an attack would be impossible, he accepted their judgment and dropped the subject. Hitler, as of yet, knew nothing about Manstein's brainstorm.

Figure 18.1
The Manstein Plan



Meanwhile, Manstein asked Heinz Guderian to visit him at Coblenz. After he arrived, Manstein asked the daring panzer commander to conduct a feasibility study on the idea of attacking through southern Belgium and Luxembourg toward Sedan, breaking through the Maginot Line extension, and splitting the French front in two. After a lengthy map study, based partially on his own memories of the terrain (where he had fought in World War I), Guderian reported back to Manstein that the operation could be carried out—if it was conducted with a large number of panzer divisions—preferably all of them. Based on Guderian's study, Manstein drafted his plan for the defeat of France, which he code-named Operation *Sichelschnitt* (Sickle Cut). It took Manstein no time at all to win the full support of his commander, Gerd von Rundstedt, for his brain-child. Now, however, he had to convince the OKH.

Colonel General von Brauchitsch paid a visit to Army Group A's Headquarters on November 3, and Manstein personally briefed him on Operation Sickle Cut. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen later stated that there was no real exchange of views, mainly because of the professional and personal differences between Manstein and the Brauchitsch/Halder team.[2]

Brauchitsch refused to consider a fundamental change to Plan I, although he did promise to give Army Group A another panzer division and two motorized rifle regiments as reserves. Rundstedt submitted two long memos to Brauchitsch, explaining why he felt that the OKH plan could not win a decisive victory and expounding on the virtues of the Manstein Plan, but without success. Privately, the commander-in-chief of the army dismissed the new plan as a manifestation of the bad relations that existed between von Bock and von Rundstedt. Manstein and Rundstedt continued to bombard the High Command with memoranda, but they were all either rejected or ignored by Zossen.

THE MECHELEN INCIDENT

On January 9, 1940, over a beer in the officers' mess at Muenster, Major Hellmuth Reinberger, the commander of the parachute school at Stendal, lamented to his friend, Major of Reserves Erich Hoenmanns, about the fact that he faced another uncomfortable train ride to Cologne, where he was scheduled to attend a staff conference the following day. Hoenmanns, a World War I pilot and commander of the nearby airfield at Loddenheide, needed some flight time and wanted to visit his wife at Cologne, so he offered to fly the paratrooper to the meeting in his Me-108 communications airplane. They took off the following morning in miserable weather, with low visibility. Soon strong winds blew them off course, and the Me-108 began to suffer from icing. The landmarks were masked by snow, and the disoriented Major Hoenmanns (who had flown the Me-108-type aircraft only once before) accidentally shut off the fuel supply to the engine. He was forced to crash land in a field, near a river, which he took to be the Rhine. A few moments after the airplane landed, however, an old peasant came up to them and addressed them in French.

Reinberger demanded to know where they were.

The peasant pointed to the nearby river and said, ''The Maas.''

''My God!'' Reinberger cried. He knew that they were in either the Netherlands or Belgium.

He had some reason to be upset. They were, in fact, near Mechelen-sur-Meuse, about 12 miles north of Maastricht, in Belgian territory. In direct violation of security regulations that prohibited anyone from flying with secret orders, he had in his briefcase the Luftwaffe's plans for the employment of the 7th Air Division, which was to be dropped in Belgium and the Netherlands. The Low Countries would thus be warned that Hitler intended to invade them. Neither major smoked, but Reinberger borrowed some matches from the peasant and was in the act of burning his papers when the Belgian gendarmes arrived and

captured the two Germans. They were taken to an outpost building, where a Captain Rodrique from Belgian intelligence arrived to examine the documents. Taking advantage of an unguarded moment, Reinberger grabbed the papers and threw them in the stove. Ignoring severe burns to his hands, the Belgian captain fished them back out again. He began to reprimand Reinberger, who put his head in his hands and cried like a baby, because he knew what would happen to him if he ever returned to Nazi Germany.

His reaction was justified. By the following day, the Belgians had a full translation of the documents, which revealed the overall task of Army Group B and its supporting air formation, the 2nd Air Fleet; the German appreciation of Dutch and Belgian forces; and the tasks of the 7th Air Division, including its drop zones (except for the Eban Emael plan).

The same day the majors crashed, Adolf Hitler had set the new invasion date as January 17—one week away. It was just before noon on January 11 when he learned that a Luftwaffe major had crashed in Belgium, carrying a briefcase full of secret plans and orders. Hitler at once became very angry.[3] Before long he worked himself into a rage and became so furious that he almost sacked Hermann Goering, who received a fearful dressing down. Goering sacrificed General of Fliers Hellmuth Felmy, the commander of the 2nd Air Fleet, and his chief of staff, Colonel Joseph Kammhuber, to the Fuehrer's rage. Both were sacked, even though they were in no way responsible for the incident (nor, for that matter, was Goering). Albert Kesselring was called in to see Goering on January 12, and wrote later, ''Never before or afterwards did I see Goering so down in the dumps—and that is saying something.'' Later that day, Kesselring was personally chewed out by the Luftwaffe commander-in-chief, along with several other generals, for no particular reason, other than the fact that Goering was mad at the world. Kesselring recalled, ''At me he snarled (there's no other word): 'And you will take over 2nd Air Fleet . . . because I have nobody else'.''[4] Stumpff succeeded Kesselring as commander of 1st Air Fleet, and Wilhelm Speidel became chief of staff of the 2nd Air Fleet. Majors Reinberger and Hoenmanns were both sentenced to death *in absentsia*, but the sentences were never carried out. They were sent to England and eventually to Canada, where they sat out the rest of the war. Their wives, however, were arrested on the personal orders of Adolf Hitler.

Despite Hitler's outrage, no one really knew yet if the secret documents had been destroyed, or whether or not Plan I had been compromised. Frau Goering hired a soothsayer, who revealed that they had been destroyed; in fact, the documents were partially burned, but enough remained to disclose the German plan, although not the date, for it had not been included on Reinberger's orders. The fact that The

Hague and Brussels ordered a partial mobilization on January 13, however, was a sure indication that the secret was out. This fact was confirmed on January 17, when Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian foreign minister, informed the German ambassador that documents had recently come into Belgian hands that clearly proved that Germany intended to invade the country.[5] In any case, the weather turned bad on January 14, and Hitler regretfully postponed the invasion until the spring.

Rundstedt attempted to use the Mechelen Incident to get OKH to change its plans for the invasion, but again without success, even though he was outspoken almost to the point of insubordination. He even demanded an opportunity to present the Manstein Plan to the Fuehrer himself. Brauchitsch and Halder could hardly relieve the most senior general in the army; Manstein, however, was another matter. At the end of January, they decided to get rid of him for once and for all by selecting him to command an infantry corps (the XXXVIII), which was then in the process of being formed at Liegnitz in eastern Germany. The XXXXI Panzer Corps was created at the same time, and Manstein asked for command of it instead, but the panzer corps was given to Georg-Hans Reinhardt, an officer who was junior to Manstein. Later, when the attack actually went forward, Manstein learned about it over the public radio.

In the meantime, at the end of January, Hitler's army adjutant, Colonel Rudolf Schmundt, made a tour of the Western Front. In the course of his trip, he visited Coblenz and reported back to Hitler that Erich von Manstein had devised an innovative new plan which resembled one of the Fuehrer's own ideas. Hitler respected and perhaps even feared General von Manstein. (He may or may not have feared him in 1940, but he certainly did by 1943.) That this acknowledged military genius had independently thought of the Ardennes offensive concept convinced Hitler that it would work.[6] By February 13, Hitler told Jodl that he had definitely decided to commit the panzers south of Sedan. Jodl urged caution and did not support this radical new idea, although his deputy, Walter Warlimont, was all for it. Hitler, however, decided to discuss the matter with General von Manstein.

Meanwhile, between February 7 and 18, a series of war games (*Kriegspiele*), for which the German General Staff was justifiably famous, were held. The first was conducted at Army Group A's headquarters Coblenz, and its objective was to test Manstein's theories. The games were based on actual French dispositions and aerial photographs, and a strong allied reaction, including heavy air attacks, was programmed into them. Guderian proposed crossing the Meuse near Sedan by the fifth day of the offensive, using strong motorized and panzer forces. General Halder denounced the idea as ''senseless'' and felt that the Meuse should be crossed via a unified attack (including

panzers, infantry, and artillery) on the ninth or tenth day of the campaign. Guderian and Gustav von Wietersheim, the less volatile commander of the XIV Motorized Corps, were horrified, and argued that the loss of momentum would kill the offensive. Rundstedt, without Manstein to back him up, hedged and opted for a more cautious approach (that is, sending the infantry across the river ahead of the panzers). Guderian and von Wietersheim then boldly expressed a lack of confidence in their leadership, including Rundstedt, because of its improper use of armor. Rundstedt equivocated, and the first meeting ended with bad feelings all around. Emotions, in fact, tended to run high throughout the exercises.

Halder, to his credit, did not keep his mind completely closed. As the games continued, he became increasingly impressed, as did Brauchitsch. By February 17, it was clear to them that the Manstein Plan would work. It was also clear that it would not work if Army Group A attacked through the Ardennes with XIX Panzer Corps alone, as Hitler had suggested on November 23. That same day, in Berlin, Erich von Manstein met with Adolf Hitler at the Chancellery, where the Fuehrer held a luncheon for three new corps commanders and Major General Erwin Rommel, the new commander of the 7th Panzer Division. Colonel Schmundt took advantage of the occasion to arrange for Hitler and Manstein to have a long interview in Hitler's private study. Manstein learned (to his surprise) that OKH had not forwarded his ideas to Hitler and that the Fuehrer knew virtually nothing of the details of his plan, although he had been partially converted to it because of its boldness. Manstein elaborated on his idea in some depth and assured Hitler that the plan would work. Hitler was won over by its daring and the possibility of a decisive victory, which the OKH plan did not offer.

The OKH quickly recognized that the direction of the wind had changed at Fuehrer Headquarters. The following day, Halder met with Hitler and presented an even bolder version of the Manstein Plan, but claimed credit for it for himself and OKH.[7] In the new Halder plan, the offensive would be spearheaded by Panzer Group Kleist, which would consist of Guderian's XIX and Reinhardt's XXXXI Panzer Corps. They were to be followed by von Wietersheim's XIV Motorized Corps, with three motorized infantry divisions. In addition, Hoth's XV Panzer Corps (two panzer divisions) was assigned to Army Group A, leaving only three panzer divisions in Bock's Army Group B. Hitler accepted the new outline, and the detailed planning for the conquest of France and the Low Countries began.

By the spring of 1940, the Germans had a clear picture of Allied dispositions and fortifications. Between Montmedy and Sedan, the Maginot Line changed from being quite strong to considerably weaker. From the Sedan to the Channel, construction on the line had started

later and was less extensive. This section was commonly called the prolonged Maginot Line, or the Maginot Line Extension. It was here that the Wehrmacht planned to strike. Heinz Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps was chosen to lead the attack.

On March 6, a major conference was held in the Reichschancellery. Present were Hitler, the army group, and army commanders, as well was von Kleist and Guderian. Each general outlined his missions and how he planned to carry them out. Guderian spoke last. According to his plan, XIX Panzer Corps would reach and breakthrough the Belgium frontier on the first day of the offensive; on Day 2, he would penetrate to Neufchateau; on Day 3, he intended to reach Bouillon and cross the Semois; on Day 4, he would reach the Meuse; and on Day 5, he would cross the Meuse and establish a bridgehead by afternoon. Then Adolf Hitler asked a critical question: Then what?

He was, Guderian said later, the first one to think to ask this vital question. ''Unless I receive orders to the contrary,'' the panzer general said, he would continue advancing to the west. It was up to the High Command to determine whether his objective was to be Amiens or Paris. But he believed that the correct course of action was to drive past Amiens to the English Channel.

Most of the generals seemed to be taken aback by Guderian's boldness. General Busch, whose 16th Army was to advance on the left of Guderian's corps, remarked that he did not believe Guderian would reach the river in five days nor cross it on his first attempt.

''You do your own job and leave me to worry about mine,'' Guderian retorted.[8] Hitler said nothing.

At the end of the conference, Hitler formally adopted the Manstein Plan. He assigned seven of Germany's 10 panzer divisions to Army Group A. Army Group B, which consisted of the 18th and 6th Armies, was given three. The reasons for giving 30 percent of Germany's armor to a secondary attack were very good. First, the Allies had to be lured into Flanders and Holland; everything depended on the main Anglo-French armies moving north. Second, the tanks would help the 6th Army take Maastricht and Liege and the 18th Army take Rotterdam. Reichenau's 6th, which was to invade northern Belgium, received two tank divisions, while Kuechler's 18th, which had the task of overrunning Holland, was given the other. The Western campaign was now divided into two parts: the Battle to the North, and the Battle of France.

THE ALLIES, 1939–40

And what were the Allies doing while Hitler's generals perfected their plans and prepared for their great offensive against the West?

Simply put, they were doing nothing at all. Strangely enough, as Guderian recalled, ''the French High Command did not regard any alternative to the old Schlieffen Plan as even conceivable.''[9] They were truly prepared to fight the last war and were still married to their Dyle-Breda Plan as a countermeasure but did not believe they would have to execute it for some time. As late as the first week of May 1940, Gamelin restored normal leave to the French troops, and General Billotte told his corps commanders not to worry about their weapons shortages, because nothing would happen until 1941.[10] Gamelin would have agreed with him; in fact, in the spring of 1940, he told General Sebastiano Visconti-Prasca, the Italian military attaché to Paris, that he wanted the Germans to attack and would willingly give the Germans a billion francs if they would attack without delay.[11]

Nor did the French have much respect for the new German tactics. On this issue, Weygand (the heir to Foch) shared the intellectual notions of Gamelin (the heir to Joffre). ''You can't hold the ground with planes,'' he said on numerous occasions between 1930 and 1935. Even General Georges agreed. He described the German adoption of panzer tactics as a terrible blunder, stating that their armor would be destroyed in the open country behind French lines, ''if they can penetrate that far, which is doubtful.''[12] The success the Germans enjoyed in the 1939 campaign they wrote off as national ineptitude on the part of the Poles.

The French generals were committing a primary military heresy. They were underestimating their opponent and taking him too lightly. The French appreciated and respected the Wehrmacht's air-ground tactics about as much as they appreciated its tank tactics, which was not at all.

In the German Army, each army group, army, and corps headquarters had a small air staff, headed by a Luftwaffe commander (*Kommandeur der Luftwaffe* or *Koluft*) to advise the army general on aviation matters. Also, each army headquarters from the division level upward had a mobile air liaison officer (the *Fliegerverbindungsoffizier*). This officer, called the *Flivo*, roved about the division's forward area, keeping the airborne Luftwaffe formations advised of targets of opportunity, the location of the German frontlines, and enemy troop concentrations and counterattacks. Each corps, army, and army group, as well as each panzer division, had an attached close reconnaissance squadron as well. The French system, on the other hand, was much bulkier. By the time the French pilots received the request for air support from a ground unit, it was at least five hours old. By this time, the battle was probably over, and, as often as not, the French division in question was overrun by the German Army, which was well supported by the Luftwaffe.

Finally, low morale was widespread in France and the French Army in 1939–40, for a number of reasons. The memory of Verdun and the other bloodbaths of World War I were still fresh in the national consciousness. Also, most of the French troops sat in their fortifications, waiting for Germany to collapse by itself. Discipline grew lax, and valuable training time was wasted. There were a great many other bad signs, which were ignored by the French High Command. For example, French troops in the evacuated frontier districts had no respect for civilian property and often engaged in looting. German troops on patrol along the frontier took four prisoners for every German soldier captured by the French. Also, there were high rates of suicide and alcoholism. The drunk French soldier became legendary, and drunkenness was so common that railroad officials set up sobering-up points at every major railroad station.

Morale in units stationed on the Maginot Line was particularly bad, due to the dampness, cramped quarters, and narrow, three-tiered bunks in the fortifications. Ventilation was poor and the septic tanks were so terrible that the smell was overwhelming in some forts. Many of the line units (that is, ground combat units) were almost as bad as the Maginot Line garrison units. The French active duty divisions were naturally the best; Series A reserve divisions varied in quality from good to mediocre; and Series B divisions were mediocre to poor. One British Army officer who inspected the 9th Army, which was composed almost entirely of Series B divisions, wrote:

> Seldom have I ever seen anything more slovenly and badly turned out. Men unshaven, horses ungroomed, clothes and saddlery that did not fit, and complete lack of pride in themselves or their units. What shook me most, however, was the look in the men's faces, disgruntled and insubordinate looks, and although ordered to give ''Eyes left,'' hardly a man bothered to do so.[13]

STRENGTHS AND DISPOSITIONS

On May 10, 1940, the Allies were definitely quantitatively superior to the Wehrmacht in most areas. Germany had a field army of more than 2 million effectives, of which 730,000 were in regular peacetime units. In addition, the Replacement Army commanded almost a million men, and there were 225,000 static troops (that is, manning fixed positions) and 425,000 construction troops (*Bautruppen*). In total, the German Army had 3.75 million men on active duty.[14] They were grouped into 147 divisions (excluding Home Army units), of which 136 were on the Western Front (118 infantry, 10 panzer, four motorized, two SS motorized divisions, one cavalry, and one parachute division). France had 115 divisions, of which 94 were on the Northeast Front (70

infantry, three armored, three light mechanized, five cavalry, and the equivalent of 13 garrison divisions). Nine other French divisions were stationed along the Italian Alps, while the rest were in North Africa or other colonial areas. The British had 10 divisions on the mainland, and the Belgians and Dutch had 24 and nine divisions, respectively. In raw numbers, therefore, the Allies had a slight advantage in 1940.

In artillery, the principle arm of the French Army, the French alone had a tremendous numerical advantage over their opponents—11,200 guns, against 7,710 for the Germans. The problem with the French artillery was that it was horse-drawn and built for static warfare. It would be destroyed by the Luftwaffe before its full weight could be brought to bare, a possibility not foreseen by the French commanders in 1940.

The French also outnumbered the Germans in tanks. The French Northeast Command alone had slightly more than 3,000 tanks (excluding about 600 modern British tanks and 600 obsolete French Renault tanks, now used to guard airfields), against 2,574 in Hitler's 10 panzer divisions. The French alone outnumbered the Germans in tank battalions 56 to 35, and their armor and gunpower were, in general, superior to the panzers. The German tanks, however, were faster, had a greater operating range, and—a critically important factor—were nearly all equipped with radios. The French tankers depended on hand-and-arm signals. In short, the French tanks were built for static warfare, while the German tanks were built for mobile operations.

German organization for armored warfare was definitely superior to the French, who had only three armored divisions (12 tank battalions), a fourth division in the process of forming (three tank battalions), and three light mechanized divisions (12 light tank battalions). The remaining French armor (31 tank battalions) were in independent units, assigned to various armies and corps, and scattered all over the countryside. The German 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 10th Panzer Divisions all had two tank regiments of two battalions each; the 6th, 7th, and 8th Panzer Divisions (formerly the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Light Divisions, respectively) each had one tank regiment of three battalions, while the 9th Panzer (formerly 4th Light) had one tank regiment of two battalions. Thus, all the German panzer battalions were concentrated in divisional units and could be massed and controlled much better than those of their French opponents. The weakest panzer divisions were the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th, because they were equipped mainly with captured Czechs tanks. In all, the Germans started the campaign with 523 PzKw Is, 955 PzKw IIs, 345 PzKw IIIs, 278 PzKw IVs, 106 Czech T-35s, and 228 Czech T-38s—hardly the overwhelming force Goebbels' propaganda machine (and some historians) have made it out to be.

The Germans had quantitative and qualitative superiority only in the air. The Luftwaffe had 3,200 airplanes ready for employment

against 1,200 French planes and about 600 for the British.[15] The main German fighter, the Me-109, could average 356 mph, as opposed to 306 mph for the French Curtiss. The French Morane and Potez 63 could fly only 300 mph, while the British Hurricane could fly 309 mph. Only the British Spitfire was slightly superior to the single-engine Messerschmitt. Even then, German fighter tactics were definitely superior. At this stage of the war, the British still flew the tight formations that were in vogue during World War I, and their pilots expended most of their energy trying not to collide with their comrades. The Germans, using the extended Finger Four formation invented by Werner Moelders, spent most of their time looking for the enemy. Since the fighter who spotted the enemy first won 80 to 85 percent of all aerial victories in World War II, the Luftwaffe definitely had the edge over the Royal Air Force, at least until the summer of 1940, when the British adopted more flexible fighter tactics.

In addition, the dispositions of the Luftwaffe aviation units were definitely superior to the French. As was the case with their armor, the French scattered their airplanes all over the country—they had planes everywhere, but no real strength anywhere. They would not have had a chance against the concentrated aerial formations of the German Air Force, even if they had been ruthlessly committed to battle; however, their commander, General Joseph Vuillermin, was so intimidated by the Luftwaffe that he avoided combat whenever possible. As a result, the French Air Force would have almost as many airplanes when France surrendered as it did when the German invasion began. Whatever else one says about Goering, one cannot honestly charge that the former leader of the Richthofen wing was afraid to commit his air force to battle.

In the all-important arena of military leadership, the Germans had a distinct advantage over their opponents in the spring of 1940. The French generals (and, to a lesser extent, the British) committed the cardinal military sin of underestimating their opponents. Although they were by no means the military geniuses and near supermen that some authors have portrayed them to be, and despite their many individual flaws and personal shortcomings, nearly all the German generals were highly competent and well-trained professionals, and were highly skilled in the tactical and operational arts; they wielded a deadly war machine, which they had built and trained themselves. ''[I]t is fair to say,'' Telford Taylor wrote later, ''that few armies have ever had more proficient generals to lead them in battle than did the German Army in the spring of 1940.''[16]

The junior officers in the Wehrmacht did not enjoy the wide margin of professional superiority over their counterparts that was found in the higher ranks. The German Officers' Corps had expanded from just over 4,000 men in 1933 to more than 150,000 by 1940. About a third of

these were World War I veterans who had not served in the Reichswehr and were, in general, not suitable for active field commands. Many of the others were NCOs promoted from the ranks or young graduates of the Officers' Training Schools. The army made every effort to maintain the quality of its lieutenants and captains, but the expansion of the armed forces was so rapid that the standards of selection and training simply could not be maintained. A great many of these young leaders were Nazis and former members of the Hitler Youth—but this fact was not entirely bad, from the strictly military point of view. For all of the many evils of that system, it did produce physically fit young people who did not suffer from the class-based social snobbery of the previous generation. The young junior officers typically maintained a good and well-disciplined relationship with their subordinates, based on mutual goals, trust, and respect. These young officers at least partially made up for their lack of training by their courage, initiative, enthusiasm, and an undeniable devotion to their cause. Although by no means always vastly superior to their opposite numbers, they nevertheless proved to be formidable opponents on the battlefields of 1940.

After the Manstein Plan was adopted, the bulk of the German panzer forces were transferred to Army Group A, in the center of the German line. The German dispositions (north to south) were as follows:

Fedor von Bock's Army Group B deployed from the North Sea to Aachen (formerly Aix-la-Chapelle). The 18th Army (Georg von Kuechler) was assigned the task of conquering Holland. It controlled three army corps, as well as the motorized SS-VT and the 9th Panzer Division. On its left flank, Reichenau's 6th Army deployed to attack the Belgian troops east of the Meuse. It included three army corps, plus Hoepner's XVI Panzer Corps (the 3rd and 4th Panzer Divisions).

Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group A extended from Aachen to Treues. On the north, Guenther von Kluge's 4th Army had the mission of attacking between Namur and Givet with three army corps plus Hermann Hoth's XV Panzer Corps (5th and 7th Panzer Divisions).

South of the 4th Army came the big German blow, which was to be delivered by Ewald von Kleist's Panzer Group Kleist. It was charged with breaking through the French 9th Army in the vicinity of Montherme and Sedan, and then advancing west, toward the English Channel. North to south, it included Reinhardt's XXXXI Panzer Corps (6th and 8th Panzer Divisions); and Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps (1st, 2nd, and 10th Panzer Divisions, plus the army's elite Grossdeutschland Motorized Regiment). In reserve, trailing behind Guderian's corps, was Wietersheim's XIV Motorized Corps, with the 2nd, 13th, and 29th Motorized Infantry Divisions.

Wilhelm List's 12th Army and Busch's 16th Army, both part of Army Group A, had the task of covering Kleist's southern flank.

South of Army Group B lay Ritter von Leeb's Army Group C, which extended from Treues to the Swiss border. It consisted of Witzleben's 1st Army, which faced the Maginot Line, and Friedrich Dollmann's 7th Army, which faced the French along the Rhine. Figure 18.2 shows the final German dispositions for the campaign in the West.

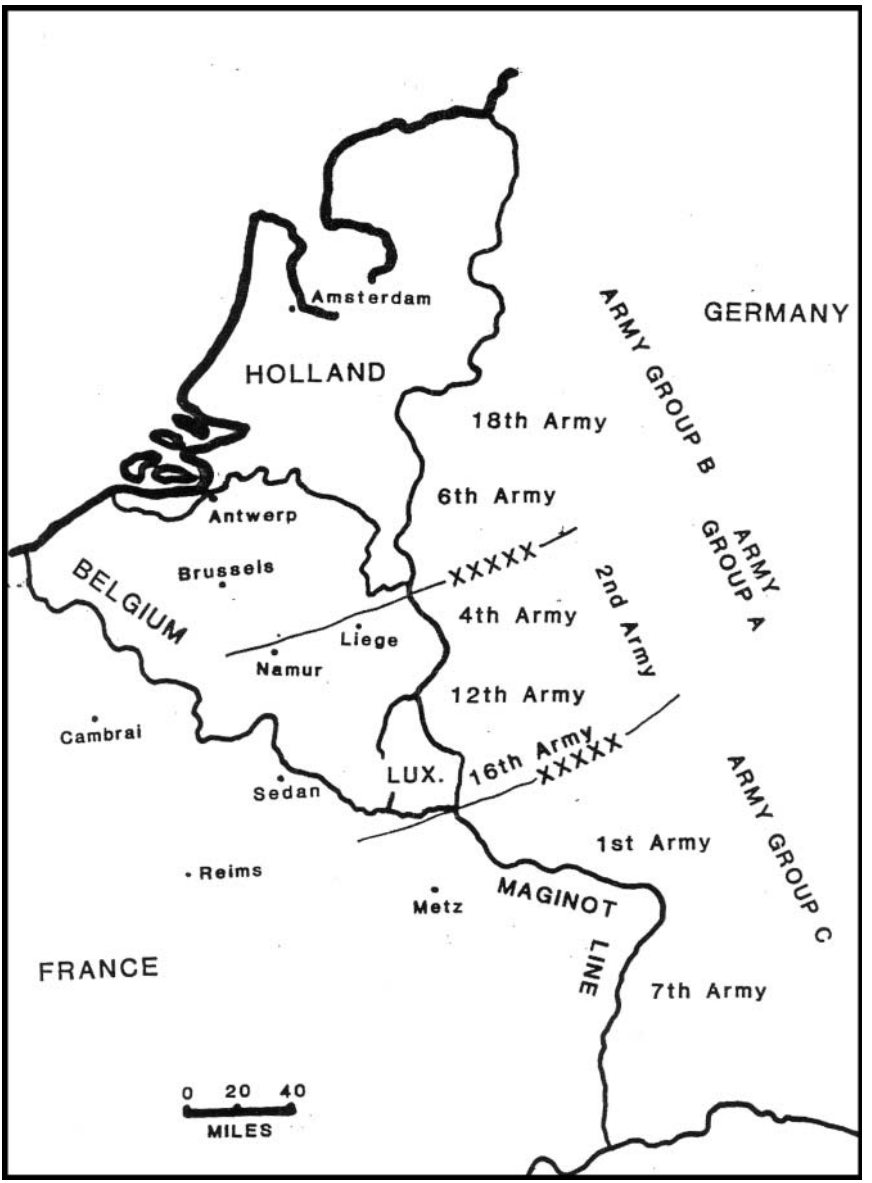
In reserve, OKH had 10 infantry divisions, plus the 11th Motorized Rifle Brigade.

Goering's Luftwaffe, which was at or near the peak of its offensive effectiveness, deployed some 3,200 aircraft to support the ground operations. In the north, Kesselring's 2nd Air Fleet had the task of supporting von Bock's armies. Under Kesselring, Baron von Richthofen's VIII Air Corps had the job of flying direct support missions for the 6th Army (and especially for Hoepner's XVI Panzer Corps), while Keller's IV Air Corps flew the immediate missions against enemy airfields, supply depots, and so on. In the south, Sperrle's 3rd Air Fleet supported Army Group A. Here, Loerzer's II Air Corps was to provide direct support for Panzer Group Kleist, while General Ulrich Grauert's I Air Corps and Greim's V Air Corps flew the wider missions. In addition, I Flak Corps under General of Flak Artillery Hubert Weise was ordered to provide anti-aircraft fire in Sperrle's zone, while Lieutenant General Otto Dessloch's II Flak Corps did the same for Kesselring. Finally, IX Air Corps (Lieutenant General Joachim Coeler) was charged with flying mine-laying and maritime-related missions, under the general supervision of the 2nd Air Fleet.

Like the Germans, the Allies also deployed in three army groups. In the north, General Gaston Billotte's Army Group 1 extended from the North Sea to Longwy. It included (north to south) the French 7th Army under General Henri Giraud, deployed from the coast to Lille; the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) (Field Marshal Lord Gort), assembled around Lille; the French 1st Army (General Georges Blanchard), facing Belgium; General Andre Corap's 9th Army, facing the Ardennes; and General Charles Huntziger's 2nd Army, facing the Arlon Gap. When the Germans invaded, these armies were to advance into Belgium and take up their positions, in accordance with the Dyle Plan. The 1st and 7th Armies were made up of France's best regular army and Series A divisions, while the 9th and 2nd included Series A and B divisions, which had been reinforced on a smaller scale, had been equipped with less modern equipment, and had received less training and fewer regular army officers. The Series B divisions had almost no regular officers and very little transport; their infantry was non-motorized or marching infantry (also called ''Straight Leg'' infantry).

General Andre Pretelat's Army Group 2 extended from Longwy to Selestat in Alsace. It included (north to south) General Charles Conde's 3rd Army in the Metz region; General Edouard-Jean Requin's 4th

Figure 18.2
German Dispositions, May 10, 1940



Army, facing the Saar; and General Victor Bourret's 5th Army, in the Strasbourg area.

General Antoine Besson's Army Group 3 in the east extended from Selestat to Belfort Gap. It included General Jeanny Garchery's 8th Army, in the Belfort Gap area, and Lieutenant General Robert Touchon's 6th Army, in reserve behind Belfort, guarding against a German invasion through Switzerland.

Meanwhile, the Belgian Army deployed in covering positions along the Albert Canal and the Meuse and established strong points at Antwerp, Liege, and Namur. These moves absorbed 12 divisions, and two more divisions were committed to Belgian Luxembourg. Another division was stationed at Gette, as a collecting point for troops withdrawing from the covering positions. Once the Belgians absorbed the initial German blow, they planned to fall back to their permanent defensive line between Antwerp and Namur, which was initially occupied by only one division. When the Allies arrived, the Belgians only had to cover the left flank of this sector, from Antwerp to Louvain. They had eight divisions in reserve on May 10.

On April 27, Hitler set the time for the invasion of France for the first week in May; however, due to fog, which grounded the Luftwaffe in the morning, it had to be set back five more times. Finally, on the night of May 7, acting on the advice of his Luftwaffe meteorologists, an increasingly disgusted Hitler set back the time for the invasion until the morning of May 10. At last, the weather cooperated, and there was no need to postpone it again.

Kleist's panzer group moved out at 6 P.M. on May 9, followed by the German infantry.

As the German movement to contact began, the Allied leadership was immersed in its own problems. In London, a major row developed over the debacle in Norway. Chamberlain's own supporters in parliament revolted on May 8, and the prime minister was forced to ask the opposition leaders for their support. When they declined, he had no choice but to resign on May 9. The following day, he was replaced by a coalition government, led by Winston Churchill.

In Paris, at 1 P.M. on May 9, Paul Reynaud also resigned after a stormy cabinet meeting, in which he demanded the dismissal of Gamelin, but this demand was blocked by Daladier, who still held considerable influence in the cabinet. Reynaud intended to announce his resignation the following day, May 10, but deferred this decision when the German offensive struck. In any case, not one Allied military or political leader believed the French reconnaissance pilots when they reported a column of vehicles 60 miles long, heading for the Ardennes.

The recon pilots were wrong. The column was not 60 miles long. It was 100 miles long.

NOTES

1. Irving, *Hitler's War*, vol. 1, p. 46.
2. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, ''Dunkirk, 1940,'' in H.-A. Jacobsen and J. Rohwer, *Decisive Battles of World War II*, Edward Fitzgerald, trans. (1965), pp. 36–37.
3. Irving, *Hitler's War*, vol. 1, p. 79.
4. Albert Kesselring, *Kesselring: A Soldier's Record* (1954), pp. 48–49 (hereafter cited as Kesselring).
5. John O. Shoemaker, ''Sichelschnitt,'' *Military Review* 42 (March 1962), p. 48.
6. Irving, *Hitler's War*, vol. 1, pp. 80–81.
7. Len Deighton, *Blitzkrieg: From the Rise of Hitler to the Fall of Dunkirk* (1979), pp. 189–90 (hereafter cited as Deighton).
8. Guderian, pp. 70–71.
9. Ibid., p. 73.
10. Deighton, p. 207.
11. Jacques Benoist-Mechin, *Sixty Days That Shook the West* (1963), p. 40 (hereafter cited as Benoist-Mechin).
12. Pertinax, pp. 11, 17.
13. Deighton, p. 91.
14. Taylor, *March*, p. 18.
15. Gouhard, p. 33. The 60 aircraft are Gouhard's figures and he is generally reliable. Addington (pp. 86–87), however, estimates that the Royal Air Force in France never exceeded 400 airplanes, and he is also a reliable source. I have, with some reservations, cited the higher figure.
16. Taylor, *March*, p. 21.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE CONQUEST OF HOLLAND

THE ALLIES TAKE THE BAIT

The Phony War ended at 3 A.M. on May 10, when German airplanes took off from the North Sea to the Alpine foothills and attacked bases and installations up to 250 miles behind the lines. By 6 A.M., half of the Belgian Air Force had been destroyed on the ground, and the Dutch Air Force had been virtually wiped out. Before the day was over, 70 enemy airfields had been bombed and strafed and the French Air Force had lost several hundred airplanes either destroyed or damaged. Only the Royal Air Force remained relatively intact. The Luftwaffe had gained air superiority over the battlefield and would not relinquish it until Dunkirk.

At 4:30 A.M. on May 10, while the combat aircraft were pounding and strafing Allied airfields, 41 Ju-52s took off from Cologne's two airports, each towing a glider. They headed for the key point of the Belgian defense system, beginning one of the most audacious operations of the war.

The targets of the gliderborne troops included the frontier fortress of Eben Emael and the three bridges to the northwest that crossed the deep Albert Canal—the strong position the Belgians intended to hold for several days, to delay the initial German offensive and give the Anglo-French divisions time to come up and take their positions. Should the Belgians hold the Albert Canal, the German timetable would be in serious disarray from the first day of the campaign. Conversely, should the Germans breach the canal line, the Allied timetable would be disrupted, and Reichenau's 6th Army would be able to take the strategic Dutch city of Maastricht, drive on Brussels, and pin down not only the Belgian Army, but also the B.E.F. and French 7th and 1st Armies as well—in other words, the entire Allied strategic reserve. If

these forces were decisively engaged against Reichenau in northern Belgium, they would be unable to intervene against the main offensive to the south and could thus be cut off and destroyed if Kleist's panzers could drive all the way to the sea. And this is exactly what the Battle of Eben Emael was all about.

Eben Emael commanded the southern part of the Albert Canal and the Meuse River as well. Located 20 miles behind the frontier, it was built like a piece of pie, with a radius of 990 yards and a width of 770 yards. It had 18 heavy guns, had armored turrets, and was manned by 1,200 picked troops, housed in underground bunkers. It had its own electricity, generated independently in vaults below the fort, and enough food and water for two months. Around its walls, which were 15 feet high at their lowest point, were machine gun emplacements, searchlights, and a quick-firing cannon. To many observers it seemed impregnable, but it had one major weakness: a flat roof. The plan to take it by glider assault was Hitler's own. Troops from the 1st Parachute Regiment were to be airdropped to take the nearby Albert Canal bridges, but the assault on the fortress itself was the job of specially trained parachute engineers, led by the daring Captain Walter Koch, a former Bonn policeman.

Koch's parachute engineers were as well trained as humanly possible. At 5:30 A.M. on May 10, their tow planes released their DFS-230 assault gliders, 12.5 miles from the target. The first glider landed right on top of the fortress and was followed by others, until 85 men were on the roof. Led by Lieutenant Rudolf Witzig, the paratroopers crippled the rooftop gun emplacements and periscopes with hollow charges. Explosive charges were attached to the steel cupolas and to the big gun barrels, grenades were thrown down openings in the ventilation system, and, finally, 110-pound charges were dropped down the staircase shafts. By the time the garrison commander ordered nearby Belgian artillery to fire at the roof of his own fortress, Eben Emael was useless, and both sides were trapped. Witzig could not get off the roof, but the Belgians could not get out, and their main guns had been destroyed.

Meanwhile, the rest of Koch's paratroopers captured the bridges at Veltzewelt, Kanne, and Vronhaven, with Koch directing operations from the latter. The Belgians were kept at bay by heavy air attacks, launched by Stukas and old Hs-123s. At Kanne, elements a Belgian infantry division eventually counterattacked, retook the bridge, and blew it up, but it was too little, too late. The 4th Panzer Division had already thrown a temporary bridge across the Meuse, and by that morning, it was already across and racing toward Eben Emael, followed by the 61st Infantry Division. Meanwhile, the 35th Infantry Division broke through to the north of the 4th Panzer, while the 269th Infantry Division moved up on the left. They relieved Witzig, Koch, and the

paratroopers about noon, and Eben Emael was finished off by the 51st Engineer Battalion from the 6th Army. The ''impregnable'' fortress capitulated at 1:15 P.M. on May 11, after having suffered a total of 20 casualties. The glider troops on the roof had lost six killed and 20 wounded.

Hitler was ecstatic when he received the news that Eben Emael had fallen, and it certainly was a major German victory. The Belgian Army had suffered a shattering psychological defeat, and its High Command had been completely knocked off balance. Reichenau, the commander of the 6th Army, intended to see to it that they would never be able to regain their equilibrium again.

Meanwhile, at 6:30 A.M. on May 10, Gamelin ordered the Allied Northeast armies to implement Plan D (the Dyle Plan). Thirty-three French and British divisions began to pivot on Givet and move forward to the Dyle. It was expected that the 60-mile march to the river would take three days. The Allied forces were spearheaded by General Rene Prioux's Cavalry Corps (two light mechanized divisions), which crossed the Franco-Belgian frontier at 7:30 A.M.[1] Its mission was to delay the German offensive ahead of the Dyle, in the Maastricht-Liege-Namur-Anvers quadrilateral. On the Allied left, the French 7th Army sped toward Breda; to the right of the 7th Army, the B.E.F. headed for the Dyle; and the French 1st Army, in the center of the Allied line, moved to block the ''Gembloux Gap'' between Wavre and Namur. To the right of the 1st, the left flank of General Andre Corap's 9th Army swung north to cover the Belgian part of the Meuse, south of Namur. The right flank of the 9th Army and General Charles Huntziger's 2nd Army held their positions along the Meuse and Chiers, between Pont-a-Bar and the left flank of the Maginot Line. The French generals assumed that the Germans would launch their main attack through the 25-mile wide Gembloux Gap, so they concentrated eight of their best infantry divisions and two cavalry divisions (with light armor) in this sector. Corap's 9th Army, on the other hand, had only seven second-rate Series B divisions and two cavalry divisions to hold 75 miles of frontage. It was spread thinner than any other French army; in addition, it was made up entirely of reservists, some of whom had to march 75 miles, just before going into action. Corap's army was also short of anti-tank guns, and two of its divisions had none at all.

The French and British had assumed that the Dyle positions had been well fortified. By evening, however, they knew the truth: nothing had been done to improve the line. There were no bunkers, fortifications, no fixed defenses, trenches, or anti-tank ditches or barriers of any kind. The Belgians had not even constructed simple earthworks. They would be hard-pressed just to halt Reichenau's 6th Army, even though he had only two of the dreaded panzer divisions under his command.

Adolf Hitler was delighted when he received the news that the British and French divisions were moving forward along the entire front and later declared that he could have wept with joy.[2] The Allies were taking the bait and rushing into the trap. Meanwhile, to the north, Luxembourg had been overrun, and the Netherlands became the seventh country to fall to the Nazi juggernaut and the fifth to be conquered by force of arms.

THE BATTLE OF HOLLAND

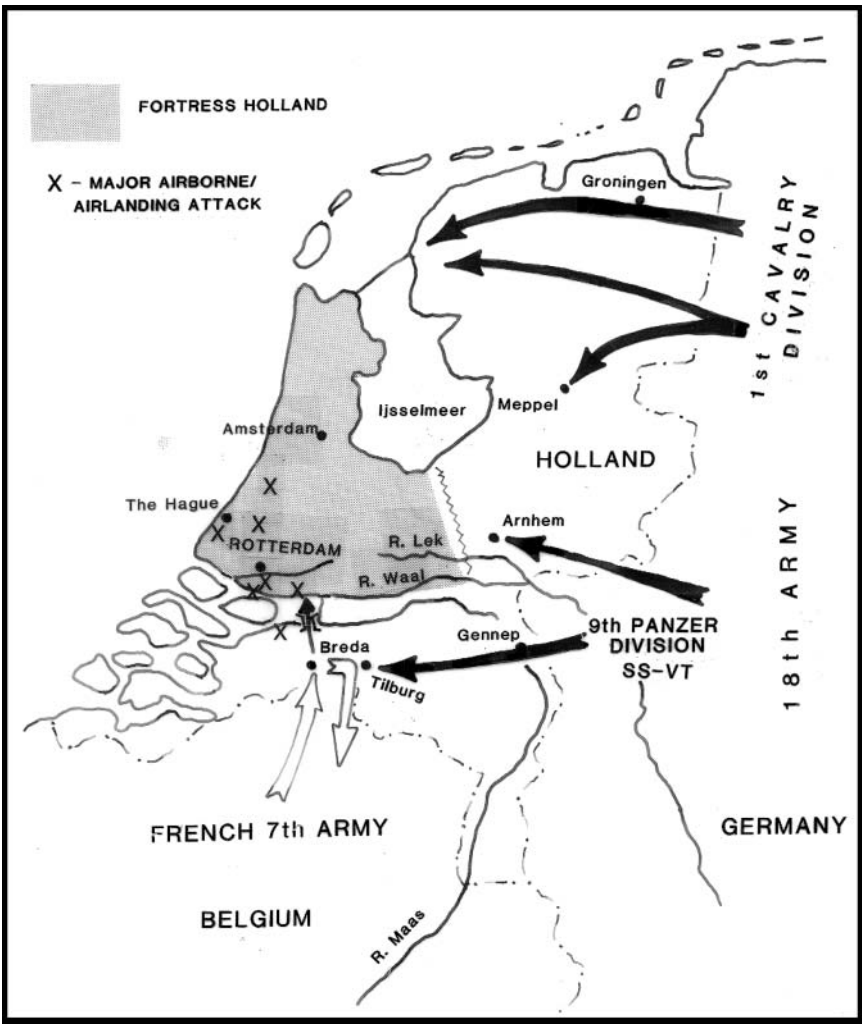
The conquest of the Netherlands was left to Kuechler's 18th Army and Lieutenant General Kurt Student's ad hoc Air Landing Corps, which included the 7th Air and 22nd Infantry (Air Landing) Divisions, under the command of Student and Lieutenant General Count Hans von Sponeck, respectively. In all, Student had about 22,000 men, but only about 4,500 of them were jump-qualified paratroopers; most of his troops were ''borrowed'' from the army.

The objectives of the 7th Air Division were to capture the bridges over the wide and deep waterways of the Maas (Meuse), Waal (Rhine), and Lower Rhine, south of Rotterdam, and to hold them until the 18th Army arrived. The capture of these bridges would breach ''Fortress Holland,'' the central Dutch defensive barrier covering The Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and Amsterdam, and effectively doom the country to Nazi occupation. The 22nd Air Landing had the task of speeding up the victory by seizing The Hague, eliminating the Dutch High Command, and capturing the Dutch royal family. For this purpose, it was given the II Battalion, 2nd Parachute Regiment (II/FJR 2), as well as its own 47th and 65th Infantry Regiments (three battalions each).[3] Figure 19.1 shows these plans and the invasion routes of the primary German ground forces.

The invasion of the Netherlands began between 3:55 and 4:10 A.M., when Kesselring's bomber formations attacked The Hague defenses, and the airfields, barracks, gun positions, and garrisons in and south of Rotterdam. About 5:10 A.M., 475 Ju-52s appeared in Dutch air space, escorted by a large number of fighters.

The attack on The Hague was a disaster. The II/FJR 2 (the initial wave) was supposed to capture the airfields near the capital and hold them until the army troops could land, but many of the paratroopers were dropped in the wrong places. The Dutch airfields were difficult to find in the flat terrain and in the early morning light. At Ypenburg, for example, 11 of the first 13 Ju-52s were shot down by alert Dutch gunners, who had been warned of the invasion (indirectly) by Colonel Oster of the Abwehr. Pilots who witnessed this slaughter began landing on main highways, putting their troops out there. At Ockenburg, General Count von Sponeck landed via glider with the II/65th Infantry

Figure 19.1
The Conquest of Holland



Regiment, but was promptly shot and critically wounded by a Dutch soldier, and effective leadership of the operation was lost. Finally, Kesselring ordered The Hague operation cancelled altogether and diverted subsequent waves—which were already airborne—to the Rotterdam battlefield. The German troops already on the ground were left to fend for themselves. Despite their defeat, however, Sponeck and his soldiers still made a significant contribution to the German victory, because

they pinned down much of the Dutch reserve in the area of the capital, so they were not available to interfere at Rotterdam and in the frontier sectors. Rumor also played a role here, for there were dozens of horror stories about tens of thousands of German paratroopers and glider-borne troops being dropped in The Hague sector. In reality, only a few hundred remained at large as night fell on May 10.

Meanwhile, to the southwest, III/FJR 1 captured the bridges over the Nieuwe Maas on the southern outskirts of Rotterdam by parachute assault, with the assistance of a company from the 65th Infantry Regiment, delivered to the sites by 11 Heinkel seaplanes. At the same time, General Student and the first waves of Lieutenant Colonel Dietrich von Choltitz's 16th Infantry Regiment (of the 22nd Division) were air landed at Waalhaven by Ju-52s. They promptly began to push toward the heart of Rotterdam, but were halted by surprisingly heavy resistance.

Several miles south of the city, the I and II Battalions of FJR 1 seized the Dordrecht and Mordijk bridges, opening the way for the vanguards of the 18th Army to reach Student at Rotterdam. The Mordijk bridges, 16 miles south of the city, were each more than a mile long. The Dutch made several attempts to retake these vital structures but were beaten back by the German paratroopers. In all, Student had 12,000 soldiers and about 4,500 paratroopers on the ground when the sun set on the first day of the campaign.

To the west, meanwhile, Kuechler's 18th Army surged forward, spearheaded by the 9th Panzer Division, the motorized SS-VT, and the SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler Regiment (SS-LAH). In all, Kuechler had only six infantry divisions, the 1st Cavalry Division, the 9th Panzer, and the equivalent of two SS motorized divisions. He was, in fact, outnumbered by the Dutch forces, which included eight infantry divisions, a light division, and several independent brigades, artillery regiments, and frontier guard battalions, and who, thanks to Colonel Oster, were on full alert. Also, Kuechler's panzer division had only 38 tanks that were not the small and obsolete PzKw I or PzKw II models.

For the initial attack, Kuechler divided his army into two corps. North of the Rhine, Lieutenant General Christian Hansen's X Corps attacked with the 227th Infantry Division (a Landwehr unit), the SS-LAH, and the 1st Cavalry Division. South of the Rhine came the main attack, delivered by General Albert Wodrig's XXVI Corps, with three infantry divisions, spearheaded by the 9th Panzer and most of the SS-VT Division. Lieutenant General Rudolf Schmidt's newly formed XXXIX Corps (with the Landwehr 208th and 225th Infantry Divisions) was initially held in reserve.

The fighting north of the Rhine was of secondary importance, and the bulk of the provinces of Overyssel, Drente, Groningen, and Friesland were overrun by 1st Cavalry Division within a matter of 48 hours. To

the south, General Wodrig attacked across the Maas with his infantry. They forced a crossing of the Maas-Waal Canal at Hatert, just south of Nijmegen, and soon captured a bridge, which had been damaged by Dutch engineers before they retreated. For Kuechler and Wodrig, however, the critical position was the Gennep Railroad Bridge over the River Maas (Meuse) in southeastern Holland. They needed to secure this bridge in order to commit the 9th Panzer Division, which had the mission of heading off the French 7th Army and preventing it from continuing north, to save Rotterdam, The Hague, and Amsterdam.

The bridge was taken from behind by members of the 800th Brandenburg Lehr Battalion z.b.V., a ''special purposes'' Abwehr unit. Clad in Dutch uniforms and aided by Dutch Fascists, they overpowered the Dutch border guards from the rear, just as the 256th Infantry Division sent over an armored train, loaded with infantry, from the other side. They poured out and helped the Abwehr/Dutch Fascists unit complete the annihilation of the frontier guards. The Brandenburger commander was awarded the first Knight's Cross of the campaign, and the infantry pushed 10 miles beyond the bridge, through the Dutch ''Peel Line'' fortifications. The XXVI Corps, meanwhile, had forced its way across the Maas at several points in the Nijmegen-Gennep sector, and the retreating Dutch were under heavy Stuka attack. The following morning, Wodrig was able to commit Lieutenant General Dr. Ritter von Hubicki's 9th Panzer Division and SS Lieutenant General Paul Hausser's *SS-Verfuegungsdivision*, and the Dutch front quickly collapsed. By that time, however, the advanced elements of General Henri Giraud's French 7th Army had already reached Breda, only 10 miles south of Moerdijk, and were closer to the bridge than the panzers; in fact, the French vanguard had reached this position before nightfall on May 10. Instead of overrunning the lightly armed paratroopers, however, the French deployed to the east and the west, as if they expected to be attacked. This hesitation was fatal to Gamelin's plan, for, during the morning of the 11th, von Hubicki and Hausser came up and blocked the route to ''Fortress Holland.'' That afternoon they attacked and defeated the French in a battle near Tilburg. The French 7th Army fell back toward Roosendaal, evacuated Breda, and eventually retreated to the Antwerp area. ''Fortress Holland'' would have to hold out on its own.

Meanwhile, through much of southern Holland, the infantry of the German 18th Army met little resistance, and there were even reports of friendly Dutch civilians greeting the vanguards with Hitler salutes and helping the German troops with road directions. Dutch resistance, however, continued to be fierce in the Rotterdam and The Hague sectors.

May 11 was a day of loneliness and crisis for General Student and his paratroopers and airborne infantry south of Rotterdam. Because Kuechler was fully engaged against the Dutch frontier units and the

French 7th Army, he was unable to relieve the isolated Air Landing Corps. Meanwhile, the Dutch in the Rotterdam sector reacted quickly, sealed off the bridgehead south of the city, and (assisted by a British destroyer, the Royal Air Force, and the few Dutch Air Force airplanes that could still fly) blasted the Waalhaven airport and made it unusable. Student countered by establishing a landing zone southeast of Rotterdam, where he was resupplied by Ju-52s, but he received little in the way of reinforcements. He was unable to advance, but was able to turn back several Dutch counterattacks and hold the critical bridges; as a result, the stalemate south of Rotterdam continued all day (and throughout the 12th and 13th as well).

That night, General von Kuechler sent Wodrig's corps (with the SS-VT) in pursuit of the French, while Schmidt's XXXIX Corps took charge of the 9th Panzer, 254th Infantry, and SS-LAH, and was given the mission of linking up with Student and securing Rotterdam.

On May 12, the remaining elements of the 1st Parachute Regiment parachuted onto the field at the Rotterdam Sports Stadium and were hurried on to commandeered tramcars, on which they rode to reinforce the troops at the bridge. The Dutch launched several desperate counterattacks and also sent ships, including trawlers and minesweepers, patrol boats, and torpedo boats, to attack the bridges, but they were driven off by German guns or Stuka dive-bombers, which sank several of them. The battle reached another crisis when the Dutch destroyer *Van Galen* steamed forward, shelled the Waalhaven airfield and attempted to blast the bridges into the water; however, it was sunk by Stukas, and the bridgehead held another day.

The 18th Army linked up with the paratroopers on the evening of May 13. Dutch resistance at last began to crumble, and Student and von Choltitz were already calling on the Dutch to surrender. That evening the Dutch government and royal family boarded a pair of British destroyers and headed for London, where they began a five-year exile. Meanwhile, General Henri Winkelmann, the Dutch commander-in-chief, wanted to delay the surrender as long as possible. He realized that he was tying down much of the 18th Army and 2nd Air Fleet, at a time when what might be the decisive battle of the war was in progress to the south; therefore, he reasoned, it was in the best interests of the Netherlands to prolong the battle as long as possible.[4] By 8 A.M. on May 14, advanced elements of the 9th Panzer had pushed across the bridges and tanks were fighting along the southern edge of the city.

General Schmidt sent a staff officer to the city commandant, Colonel Scharroo, with a note demanding that Rotterdam surrender or be subjected to an aerial bombardment. The colonel rejected the message, which he suspected was a ruse, on the grounds that it contained neither the name, rank, nor signature of the general.

Schmidt was not bluffing. In fact, 100 He-111 bombers from Colonel Walter Lackner's 54th Bomber Wing (KG 54) were en route to Rotterdam early that afternoon, when a Dutch captain arrived at Schmidt's headquarters, under a flag of truce. It was soon obvious to the general that the Dutch were playing for time, so he demanded a decision on whether they were going to surrender by 6 P.M. at the latest. He did, however, decide to postpone the terror bombing of Rotterdam and instructed the Luftwaffe signal unit at Waalhaven to send a message to the in-flight bombers, asking them to delay the attack. The He-111s, however, had already wound up their trailing radio antennae and could not be contacted. The backup communications procedure was for the German ground forces to fire red flares when they spotted the bombers, which approached the city in two columns at 3 P.M. Red was certainly a poor choice for the flares, since the tracers from the Dutch anti-aircraft guns were also red. The left-hand column (46 bombers) was led by Lieutenant Colonel Otto Hoehne, who, to his horror, saw the flares just as he released his bombs. He hurriedly signaled the rest of his flight to abort the mission. Only two other aircraft dropped their bombs, and Hoehne turned south toward his secondary target.

Unfortunately, the right-hand column, led by Colonel Lachner himself, never saw the flares, because of the smoke from burning buildings and Dutch anti-aircraft fire. His 54 Heinkels dropped 97 tons of HE bombs just north of the northernmost German positions. Usually such bombs do not cause major fires, but some of these hit a margarine factory and warehouse, and the fats rapidly caught on fire. The flames spread quickly and, as fate would have it, the water mains of the Rotterdam Fire Department had been broken during the fighting. The citizens' fire brigades, equipped with antiquated two-wheel hand pumps, could not deal with the fire, which promptly consumed 1.1 square miles of central Rotterdam. Nine hundred and eighty people were killed and 78,000 left homeless. Allied propaganda promptly estimated the civilian death toll at 20,000 to 30,000.

About 6 P.M., the Dutch Supreme Commander, General Henri Winkelmann, agreed to Schmidt's surrender terms, and German fire trucks were rushed to Rotterdam from as far away as the Ruhr. General Schmidt, for one, was furious about the bombing, which continues to be a source of controversy to this day. Rotterdam was bombed to end the fighting in the north, so that the panzer and motorized units of the 18th Army could be redeployed south, against the British, French, and Belgians. It was not because of a deliberate policy of cruelty on the part of Hitler and Goering, as was charged at the time and is still suggested to this day; nevertheless, it was still a brutal attack, launched on the direct orders of Hermann Goering, primarily against civilian targets. General Schmidt and even General Kesselring considered it unnecessary, and

Schmidt went so far as to send Colonel Scharroo a message, stating that he ''deplored'' the bombardment. This did not prevent Goebbels' propaganda broadcasters from predicting within an hour of the Rotterdam bombing that the same fate would befall Utrecht if the Dutch did not surrender at once.[5] This time no one doubted it, and the Dutch capitulated that very evening. Scattered Dutch and French resistance would continue in Zeeland, Walcheren, and South Beveland until May 17, when the sector was cleared by a mixed army-SS battlegroup under Paul Hausser.

Meanwhile, during the evening of May 14, General Student went to the Dutch military headquarters, where he established his CP. Outside, several hundred Dutch troops assembled to hand over their arms and surrender. They were in the process of doing so when a battle group from the SS-LAH appeared on the scene. They were in the process of rushing to The Hague, to rescue von Sponeck's isolated detachments, and were surprised to see so many armed Dutchmen. It has never been established with certainty whether the SS men were unaware that the Dutch were surrendering or were just trigger-happy; in any case, they opened up on them with machine guns. The Dutch soldiers, of course, returned the fire. General Student and Colonel von Choltitz heard the shooting and rushed to a window, when a ricocheted bullet crashed through the glass and struck the general in the head. For several days, he was not expected to live and was in a coma for some time, but Dutch brain surgeons at a nearby civilian hospital pulled him through. He would not recover for months.

In the meantime, Colonel von Choltitz rushed outside and, in a demonstration that took considerable courage, placed himself between the opposing forces and stopped the fighting. He ordered the Dutch to reassemble in a nearby church and sent the SS on their way. There were no more incidents.

For all practical purposes, the battle of Holland ended on the night of May 14. The Germans had never outnumbered the Dutch, but they won the battle in five days thanks to three decisive advantages: tactical surprise, initiative, and air superiority. These same three advantages also played a decisive role in the south, where the deciding battles of the campaign were now being fought.

THE MADADOR'S CAPE

The operations of Colonel General Walter von Reichenau's 6th Army have been likened to those of the caped hand of a skillful matador. His task was to convince the Allies that his thrust was the main German invasion and to force the Anglo-French command to commit their mobile strategic reserve against his divisions in northern Belgium.

The battle went well from the beginning. The Belgians had planned to delay the Germans on the Albert Canal line for a week; it held less

than a day and a half. On May 11, IX Corps crossed through Dutch Limburg and advanced rapidly into northern Belgian. In Reichenau's center, Viktor Schwedler's IV Corps pushed across the Maas just north of Maastricht and launched an assault crossing over the Albert Canal in the afternoon. The critical part of the 6th Army's offensive, however, took place on its left wing, where General of Infantry Alfred Waeger's XXVII Corps pushed through the gap created by the fall of Eben Emael and drove the Belgians back to Liege, surrounding several forts in the process. As a result, Reichenau committed Hoepner's XVI Panzer Corps before noon and, well supported by Richthofen's Stukas, it surged passed Tongres and, at 1 P.M., collided with General Rene Prioux's two mechanized divisions, which were in full retreat by 3 P.M. That afternoon, Prioux signaled General Billotte, the commander of the 1st Army Group, that he might not be able to hold off the Germans long enough for the 1st Army to reach the Dyle. Billotte responded by ordering his divisions to march for the river day and night—in effect, accepting the risk of heavy Luftwaffe attack in the daytime. To the surprise of the Allied troops, no such attacks came. This, of course, was because the Germans wanted the Allied mobile divisions to proceed into Belgium as rapidly as possible.

On May 12, Reichenau's infantry poured across the Albert Canal and pursued King Leopold's army to the west. On the left wing of the 6th Army, General Waeger encircled Liege with one division and hurried after Hoepner's Corps, which was advancing in the direction of Namur. The following day, as the Allied infantry reached and dug in along the Dyle, the French Cavalry Corps fell back on the 1st Army's outposts. They had trouble finding gaps in the Allied lines, and many cavalry units were caught in their own barbed wire or ran into ''friendly'' minefields. That evening, Billotte and his staff yielded to the temptation of using the light mechanized divisions as local reserves. Like so many French mobile divisions, they were scattered throughout the army's zone of operations and were never again used as a corps.

By the morning of May 14, the Anglo-French forces had taken their positions along the Scheldt estuary to the Antwerp area, along the Dyle line to Wavre, and in the Gembloux Gap, which extended from Wavre (on the Dyle) south to Namur. Reichenau now faced 36 Allied divisions. The 6th Army had only 15 divisions on the line, with six more in reserve. It had, however, already done its job. It had overrun northeastern and north-central Belgium and forced the Allies to commit their best divisions in the wrong place. There was still plenty of fighting ahead for Reichenau's men, because now the French, British, and Belgians had to be pinned down. But Fedor von Bock's Army Group B had done its job. Now everything was up to Army Group A.

NOTES

1. Rene-Jacques-Adolphe Prioux (1879–1953) was the former director of cavalry at the War Ministry. He had been head of the French Military Mission to Warsaw in the early 1930s.
2. Benoist-Mechin, p. 40.
3. The 22nd Air Landing Division also included the 22nd Anti-Tank, 22nd Engineer, 22nd Reconnaissance, 22nd Signal, 22nd Flak, and 22nd Medical Battalions.
4. Henri Winkelmann (1876–1952), the former commander of the Dutch 4th Division, had retired in 1934 but was recalled to active duty in 1939 as commander of the Air Defense Region Utrecht-Soesterberg. He was named commander-in-chief of the Dutch Armed Forces in 1940. He was a prisoner of war from 1940 to 1945, when he again retired.
5. Taylor, *March*, pp. 202–3.

CHAPTER XX

THE DRIVE TO THE CHANNEL

While the 18th Army overran Holland and the 6th Army tied down the bulk of the Allied mobile forces in northern Belgium, the main German attack unfolded to the south, unnoticed by Gamelin and his generals.

The vanguards of Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group A crossed the border into Luxembourg and Belgium at 5:35 A.M. on May 10. The main thrusts, of course, were launched by the panzer divisions, which spearheaded the invasion. On the north lay Hoth's corps, with the 5th Panzer and 7th Panzer Divisions. South of Hoth's forces lay Panzer Group Kleist, which included half of Germany's armor and three of her motorized divisions. On Kleist's right lay the Georg-Hans Reinhardt's XXXXI Panzer Corps, and on the left was Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps.

On the other side of the line, only the right flank corps of General Andre Corap's 9th Army was on the French side of the Meuse. The other two corps had to cross into Belgium and march up to 75 miles before they could occupy their positions on the Belgian Meuse. Since they were not opposed, however, the French forces reached the river first. Corap's units (right to left) included Lieutenant General Emmaneul Libaud's XLI Corps (102nd Garrison and 61st Infantry Divisions); Lieutenant General Julien Martin's XI Corps (18th and 22nd Infantry Division, marching for Houx and Dinant, respectively); and Lieutenant General Jean-Gabriel Bouffet's II Corps (5th Motorized Infantry Division).[1] In reserve, Corap had the 53rd Infantry Division and 4th North African Infantry Division, both of which initially remained on the French frontier.

According to the German plan, Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps was to deliver the main blow in the vicinity of Sedan, at the junction of the

French 9th and 2nd Armies; Reinhardt's XXXXI was to deliver the secondary attack against the center of the French 9th Army; and Hoth's XV Panzer was to launch a supporting attack, against the left wing of Corap's 9th Army. As the battle evolved, however, the roles of the XV and XXXXI reversed, largely due to the initiative of General Rommel, the aggressive commander of the 7th Panzer Division.

Rommel's command, popularly known as the ''Ghost Division,'' crossed the frontier on May 10 and skirted the northern edge of the Ardennes against light resistance from the French 1st Light Cavalry Division. ''I have found,'' Rommel wrote later, ''again and again that in encounter actions, the day goes to the side that is the first to plaster its opponents with fire ... even when the exact position of the enemy is unknown.''[2]

He reached the Meuse late on the afternoon of May 12, in advance of any of the other German forces; however, just as he reached Dinant, the French blew up the bridge. Two miles north of Houx, one of his panzer commanders found the bridge at Yvoir intact, but when he tried to cross, a Belgian officer blew it up, tank and all. Rommel now had no choice but to attempt a river crossing; however, because the Belgian and French cavalry were supposed to delay the Germans for six days, instead of three, the French division charged with defending the sector had only five battalions in place.

Meanwhile, the 7th Motorcycle Battalion discovered an ancient stone weir at Houx. Although too narrow for vehicles, it could support the troops, and the Germans made their way to an island in the middle of the river, but they could not cross due to the resistance of the French 66th Infantry Regiment.

During the night of May 12–13, the French 66th was replaced by the less resolute men of the 39th Infantry Regiment, who fired on the dismounted motorcycle troops from the nearby hill tops, instead of holding the river bank. As a result, at 3 A.M. on the morning of the 13th, the motorcyclists, led by Major Friedrich-Carl Steinkeller, were able to establish a small bridgehead—the first across the Meuse.[3]

In keeping with the French policy of spreading armor and artillery throughout the front, Corap had only one company of tanks anywhere near Houx. He ordered them to attack and destroy the motorcyclists' bridgehead at 8 A.M., but Rommel struck first. At dawn, assault troops from the 6th Rifle Regiment climbed into rubber boats and tried to force a crossing near Dinant. The initial attack was shot to pieces by the French, but the motorcycle bridgehead continued to grow, while the Luftwaffe pounded the French 18th Infantry and 5th Motorized Divisions, which ''went to ground'' near Houx. Meanwhile, Rommel personally took command of an infantry battalion and led it across the river. By noon, the German bridgehead was three miles wide and two

miles deep. The panzer engineers, however, had not yet been able to complete a pontoon bridge, and there were no panzers on the western bank when Corap's tanks appeared. Rommel yelled an order for his troops to engage them with small arms fire and even ordered flare guns to be fired. The French apparently believed that the flares were sighting rounds for artillery and quickly retreated, even though they could have easily wiped out Rommel's bridgehead at this point.

On the morning of May 14, Rommel (who now had a tank bridge across the river) attacked and overran a French infantry regiment and advanced toward Onhaye, the barrier to the Philippeville Gap. Here he was met by elements of three French divisions. The fighting was bitter, but French resistance was broken by the end of the day, and the 7th Panzer drove toward Philippeville in the French rear. During this battle, Rommel demonstrated the command technique that distinguished many of the German field generals (and especially the divisional commanders) during World War II: the practice of ''leading from the front.''

This method of leadership, of course, had some serious drawbacks. Communications problems were serious, because one well-placed enemy shell could knock out a signals truck, and the commander would no longer be able to command. Also, an excited leader could easily become overly impressed by a purely local success and judge the overall battlefield situation incorrectly. Most obviously, the general would be in constant danger of being killed or wounded. In this battle alone, Rommel had a close brush with death, when the tank in which he and Colonel Karl Rothenburg were riding was knocked out and Rommel was wounded in the face by a stray shell splinter. Before the war was out, Rommel would be wounded and miraculously escape death on more than one occasion, using this leading-from-the-front technique. Rothenburg, the commander of the 25th Panzer Regiment and a *Pour le Merite* holder from World War I, would use this technique until he was killed in action on the sixth day of the Russian campaign. Hundreds of other senior officers would share his fate, but it still must be concluded that this method was extremely effective, despite the high rate of casualties among senior officers.

Meanwhile, on Rommel's left flank, the 32nd Infantry Division came up, crossed the Meuse as evening fell, and attacked the French 22nd Infantry Division, which ''disintegrated at the first blow.''[4] To the north of Rommel's bridgehead, the 8th Infantry Division also crossed the river (at Yvoir) and moved inland. By nightfall, General Martin realized the battle was lost and ordered his corps to retreat. Throughout the day, while the XI Corps was being mauled, General Billotte, the commander of the Army Group 1, continued to hold the French 1st Armored Division in reserve at Charleroi, about 23 miles from

Rommel's bridgehead. On the morning of the 14th, he belatedly ordered it to wipe out the German foothold. All day long the 1st Armored tried to reach its assembly areas but was slowed down by the Luftwaffe and hoards of refugees clogging the roads to the west. The French had placed their fuel trucks in the rear of the divisional column—a terrible mistake. As a result, they virtually ran out of gas and had to camp for the night at Flavion and Ermeton, only a few miles from Rommel's vanguard. Meanwhile, during the evening, Lieutenant General Maximilian von Walsporn's 5th Panzer took advantage of General Martin's retreat and crossed the Meuse unopposed.

During the night, Walsporn's and Rommel's panzers were hurriedly refueled by jerry cans, transported by wheelbarrows. The French tanks of this era were infantry support vehicles and needed almost constant refueling. To make matters worse, they were refueled by specially designed, slow, tanker vehicles. As a result, the 1st Armored was still largely immobilized at 9:30 A.M., when Hoth attacked it in two prongs: Rommel from the south, Walsporn from the north. The Germans were well supported by Stuka dive-bombers, while the French tankers were without support from their airplanes or even from the infantry of their own 9th Army. They fought courageously, but, by the end of the day, the remnants of the French armored division were in full retreat; only 17 of its 175 tanks that entered the battle survived, and many of the French armored vehicles (excellent B tanks) had been blown up by their own crews because they were out of fuel. Only the 25th Tank Battalion (which had gotten lost and missed the battle) survived.

While Rommel and Hoth were experiencing considerable success against the left wing of the French 9th Army, Reinhardt's corps bogged down against Corap's center, where the 102nd Garrison Division managed to hold the entire XXXXI Panzer in check at Montherme and Nouzonville until the 9th Army ordered a general French retreat on May 15. In the meantime, one of the decisive battles of the campaign was being fought at Sedan, about 40 miles south of Rommel's original bridgehead at Dinant.

THE MAIN ATTACK

On May 10, Heinz Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps crossed the Luxembourg frontier between Vianden and Echternach, driving west in three columns: on the right (northern) flank was Lieutenant General Rudolf Veiel's 2nd Panzer Division, in the center was Lieutenant General Friedrich Kirchner's 1st Panzer Division, and on the left was Lieutenant General Ferdinand Schaal's 10th Panzer Division, which included the elite Grossdeutschland Motorized Infantry Regiment. They met little or no resistance in Luxembourg, which was completely overrun by the

end of the day. By early afternoon, the XIX Panzer was in eastern Belgium, where it skirmished with French light cavalry on May 10–11. The French cavalry was supposed to delay the German advance but experienced little success. Kleist's biggest problems were traffic control and clearing abandoned Belgian minefields, not enemy resistance.

General von Kleist was nervous on the night of May 10–11, for he ordered the 10th Panzer Division (on his far left flank) to turn south to Longwy, because of unconfirmed reports that the French cavalry was advancing from that direction. Guderian emphatically objected to losing one-third of his corps to fend off a ''hypothetical threat.'' Realizing that he was right, Kleist cancelled the order, and the 10th Panzer continued its drive for the Meuse.

On May 11, the second day of the campaign, Guderian's corps moved across the southern tip of Belgium, pushing back Belgian ''Chasseurs Ardennais'' and the French motorized and cavalry troops. The light cavalry of the French 2nd Army (two divisions) were forced to withdraw across the Semoy, exposing the right flank of the French 9th Army's light cavalry (two divisions). Before the day was over, the French horsemen had been driven into the woods and forests, and were hiding or trying desperately to reach French lines.

That evening, after he had committed almost all of his mobile strategic reserve, General Gamelin began to realize that the German main attack might come through the Ardennes after all, since French cavalry units had already identified six panzer divisions in this sector. He therefore ordered 11 divisions to converge on the threatened area, using the highest rail priority. These divisions would arrive on the Meuse from May 14 to May 21. Gamelin, however, was not unduly concerned, since he did not expect the Germans to begin an attempt to cross the Meuse until the infantry of General List's 12th Army arrived, which would not happen until May 15 at the earliest.

The following day, May 12, the 1st Panzer Division rolled across the Semois (Semoy) River and crossed into French territory north of Sedan. That same morning, the 10th Panzer Division, personally led by General Schaal, pushed on to French soil, overran the first frontier defenses, and pursued the French cavalry to the west. Before nightfall, the last of the French cavalry fell back behind the Meuse, and all the bridges between Dinant and the Bar River (south of Sedan) were blown. According to the French plan, the cavalry was supposed to have delayed the Germans for five or six days; they had done so for less than three. As a result, the 9th Army faced Kleist's onslaught without all its forces. Even so, the French High Command could not bring itself to believe that the Germans would attack before they brought up their heavy guns. Meanwhile, on the German side, Colonel Schmundt, the Fuehrer's adjutant, asked Kleist whether he intended to cross the

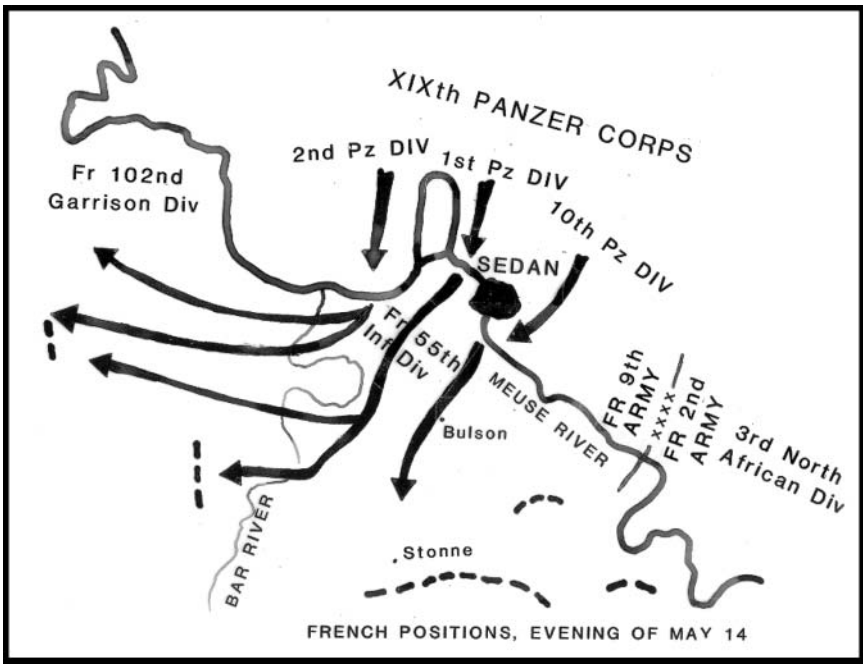
Meuse at once or to wait for List's infantry. Kleist replied that he intended to ''try at once, without wasting time.'' When he learned of this reply, Hitler approved and ordered that Kleist be supported by the dive-bombers of Baron von Richthofen's VIII Air Corps, which, until then, had been flying air support for General von Reichenau.[5]

General Charles Huntziger, the commander of the French 2nd Army, was alarmed at the rapid German advance and demanded reinforcements. The Northeast Front sent him the 3rd Armored and the 3rd Motorized Divisions—all that was left of the central reserve except for the 14th Infantry Division, which was on its way to 9th Army.

That night, Kleist issued his orders for the Battle of the Meuse. The crossings were to begin at 4 P.M. on May 13. The XIX Panzer was to conduct assault crossings between the mouth of the Bar River and Bazeilles (that is, in the Sedan vicinity). Guderian pointed out that he would have only two panzer divisions for the assault, since the 2nd Panzer was still being held up at Semoy. Kleist overruled this objection (if it can be called that) and ordered him to attack anyway. (Guderian's uncharacteristic timidity can probably be explained by the fact that he was still suffering from the effects of an enemy air raid against his headquarters, during which the window in front of which he was standing had been shattered by a shell fragment.) In any case, Guderian had planned his attack months before. His staff issued it instructions by pulling out its old orders from the Coblenz war games and merely changed the attack time from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. The 1st Panzer Division (in the center of his line) would deliver the main attack, which would be spearheaded by the Grossdeutschland Regiment. In addition, to lend weight to the main attack, the corps artillery and the bulk of the 2nd and 10th Panzer Artillery Regiments from the other two divisions were temporarily attached to the 1st Panzer. Because of a loop in the river, the assault forces would actually be facing south, and the main crossings would take place just west of Sedan. Figure 20.1 illustrates the Battle of Sedan, the decisive battle in the Western Campaign of 1940.

General Huntziger had deployed his divisions to cover the Meuse, an unfordable river 60 yards wide in this sector. It was protected by barbed wire, trenches, pill-boxes, and machine gun nests. In fact, it averaged eight pill-boxes and eight machine gun nests per mile of frontage, or one every 200 yards. No position, however, is any better than the troops assigned to defend it. The corps on Huntziger's right flank (the XVIII) was responsible for covering the Maginot Line, and he had given it his best divisions. His poor Series B divisions were assigned to Lieutenant General Pierre Grandsard's X Corps, which held what turned out to be the critical position of Sedan. It included the 3rd North African Infantry Division on the right and the 55th Infantry

Figure 20.1
The Battle of Sedan



Division on the left. On May 10, Huntziger had decided that X Corps was too weak, so he reinforced it with the 71st Infantry Division. After the campaign, General Grandsard wrote that the soldiers of this unit, like those of the 55th Infantry, were "fat and flabby men in their thirties who had to be retrained."[6] When dawn broke on May 13, the 71st Infantry still had not fully occupied its sector. Grandsard, who did not believe that an attack was imminent, had allowed the reservists of the 71st to proceed at an extremely leisurely pace and had failed to get his corps reserve (an infantry regiment and two tank battalions) into position to launch a possible counterattack. He was, in fact, relying almost exclusively on the famous French artillery to defeat the Germans, should they strike in his zone. The 55th Infantry alone had 140 guns available on May 13.

Beginning early that morning, the Stuka dive-bombers of Richthofen's VIII Air Corps carried out a constant aerial bombardment. Kleist and Hugo Sperrle, the air fleet commander, had wanted the VIII to launch one large, overwhelming raid, but Guderian (acting on the

suggestion of his chief of staff, Colonel Walter Nehring) persuaded Richthofen to conduct a continual, less intensive, assault. This eliminated the horse-drawn French artillery, which was paralyzed by the constant threat of air attack. The dive-bombers continued to make passes over the French positions even after they had dropped their bombs. Under their wings were air-activated sirens, called ''the trumpets of Jericho,'' which made a fierce scream when they dove. The French artillerymen did not know that these morale-shattering sirens, which had been installed on the orders of General Udet, could not be activated if the Stukas were diving at the proper angle to make a real attack. Throughout the day some 200 Stukas, protected by several fighter wings, flew multiple missions over French lines, completely demoralizing the French gunners, most of whom were seeking safety in the woods as Guderian's assault units crossed the river.

At 4 P.M. on May 13, Lieutenant Colonel Hermann Balck's 1st Motorized Rifle Regiment, covered by hundreds of guns from Germans tanks and the fire of three panzer artillery regiments, crossed the river in pneumatic boats about 1.5 miles west of Sedan, along with the Grossdeutschland Regiment and the 1st Motorcycle Battalion. Guderian later remarked that the assault proceeded ''as though it were being carried out on maneuvers.''[7] The opposition was weak. General Gouhard wrote later that the troops in most of the strongpoints ''disappeared as soon as they caught sight of the enemy, if not before!''[8] By 6 P.M., resistance had been crushed in the sector of the 1st Panzer Division, and the Grossdeutschland Regiment swung behind Sedan. At 7 P.M., it took the critical Marfee Heights, which overlooked the city and the Meuse. Half an hour later, Balck's regiment joined them on the high ground southeast of Sedan; however, the 10th Panzer Division's assault troops met stiffer resistance and only managed to establish a small bridgehead. The 2nd Panzer Division, which had been held up on the Semoy, did not arrive on the Meuse until around 5 P.M. Guderian immediately sent it across the river on his far right flank, with the objective of driving a wedge between the French 55th Infantry Division (on the extreme left flank of Huntziger's 2nd Army) and the 102nd Fortress Division on the extreme right flank of Corap's 9th. It was remarkably successful. At 5:10 P.M., the 55th reported that it had lost contact with the infantry on its left. A gap had opened between the 9th and 2nd French Armies—a gap that would never be closed.

Within an hour, word had spread through French artillery channels that German tanks had crossed the Meuse and broken through. These rumors were not true: not a single panzer had yet crossed the river, and the German engineers had not yet built a bridge capable of supporting a modern tank. Nevertheless, the artillery units panicked and fled to the rear in droves. The panic soon infected the infantry, which

also took to its heels. One French officer wrote of ''terrified fugitives.... Officers among the deserters ... terror-stricken and in the grip of mass hysteria.''[9] Even the colonels commanding the corps heavy artillery ordered their troops to retreat and disappeared. Most of the guns were simply abandoned. The panic soon spread to the 71st Infantry, which also began to fall apart, despite the lack of enemy pressure. Some of the troops did not stop until they reached Rheims—60 miles away.

Meanwhile, the panzer engineers assembled the first ferry in 38 minutes, and by midnight had a 16-ton pontoon bridge across the Meuse at Glaire. At the same time, Colonel Balck led his infantry on through the darkness and expanded the bridgehead another three miles. During the night, the engineers completed a second pontoon bridge at Glaire and several tanks crossed (without lights) before daybreak. Guderian reported that the penetration had now widened considerably beyond Chemery and that his men had taken ''thousands of prisoners.''[10] By 6 A.M. on May 14, the entire 1st Panzer Brigade had crossed the river.

The French counterattacked at 7 A.M. with an infantry regiment and two tank battalions. They started three hours behind schedule—in broad daylight, instead of under the cover of darkness, as originally planned. The initial rush surprised the Germans and two panzers were quickly knocked out. Fortunately for the Germans, the nearby 1st Panzer Engineer Battalion quickly joined the battle, using hollow charges to break the tracks of the French tanks. This was dangerous business and several pioneers were killed, including the battalion commander. Finally, however, the French armor wavered; then it was attacked by the dive-bombers. By 9 A.M. the French strike force was in full retreat; more than half of its tanks had been destroyed or disabled and abandoned, the commander of the French infantry regiment had been captured, and the last combat-worthy elements of the 55th Infantry Division had ceased to exist. The remnants of the 71st Infantry Division were in full retreat, even though the division had not been engaged by German ground forces. By evening, it too had disappeared. Meanwhile, the 2nd Panzer Division crossed the Meuse, directly behind the 1st.

At 8:30 A.M. that same morning, General Huntziger signaled General Gamelin that the breach at Sedan had been sealed off and that Marfee Heights was still in French hands. In fact, it now lay several miles behind German lines.

Guderian, meanwhile, paused only long enough to ensure that the Grossdeutschland Regiment and the 10th Panzer Division were in control of the high ground at Stonne, a few miles south of the main pontoon bridges. By noon, he had decided that he was going to break out to the west and head for the English Channel that same day. Early that afternoon, the 2nd Panzer Division expanded the bridgehead to the

north and rolled up the right flank of the 102nd French Garrison Division. At the same time, the 1st Panzer Division swamped the 53rd Infantry Division piecemeal, as it finally came up from an all-night march. The road to the west was now open to the Germans.

Meanwhile, on the morning of May 14, the French 3rd Armored Division joined the French 3rd Motorized Division in the Chesne sector, on Guderian's southern flank and only nine miles from the battlefield.

The 3rd Armored was a first-rate formation with good morale. It included two battalions of B tanks and two battalions of H-39 tanks, a towed artillery regiment, and a motorized infantry regiment. It was much stronger than the 10th Panzer Division, which was equipped largely with obsolete PzKw Is and IIs. The 3rd Armor lacked unit training, because it had been formed just six weeks before, and it was short on anti-tank guns, radios, engineers, repair units, and various items of equipment. These deficiencies, however, were more than made up for by the fact that it was composed of young regulars whose morale was excellent.

The 3rd was supposed to launch its counterattack, along with the 3rd Motorized, at 3:30 P.M., but Lieutenant General Jean Flavigny, the commander of the XXI Corps, cancelled the advance 30 minutes before it was scheduled to jump off. Apparently, he was concerned that the rest of his zone was threatened, so he dispersed the 3rd Armored and 3rd Motorized Divisions over a 12-mile sector, behind his infantry. General Huntziger was in no position to countermand these orders, since he was in the process of moving his headquarters back to Verdun and could not be reached.

While the French dissipated their armor everywhere, Guderian struck west at 3 P.M., into the rear of the 9th French Army, with the concentrated firepower of the 1st and 2nd Panzer Divisions. By evening he had crossed the Ardennes Canal and was engaging the last of the 9th Army's reserves.

While the French armored counterattack failed to materialize and the Allied air forces tried but failed to provide relief, Panzer Group Kleist, well supported by the Luftwaffe, crushed and annihilated the French 9th Army. ''On the ground ... Corap's ravished army scarcely even *looked* like a disciplined force,'' one historian wrote.

The Luftwaffe pitched into the CP; it scoured the roads, bombed the intersections, made it impossible for reinforcements to be brought up, and disorganized communications. The withdrawal soon acquired the appearance of a rout. The infantry shunned open country. The artillery was paralyzed; most of the horses had been machine-gunned from the air; the guns were immobilized and could not be trained. Lorries heaped with men of all services scurried from the front.[11]

As Guderian drove west and the French defenses on the Bar collapsed, General Huntziger retired to the southwest, further exposing

the already disintegrating right flank of the 9th Army and increasing the gap in the French line to 10 miles. Schaal's 10th Panzer Division pursued the retreating French 2nd Army to the south and covered Guderian's southern flank by attacking Huntziger near of the village of Stonne (20 miles south of Sedan). This was no longer an easy task, since the battalions of the 3rd Armored and 3rd Motorized Divisions were now in this sector, and the 10th Panzer no longer faced third-rate troops. The heights south of Stonne changed hands several times and were not secured until May 15. Meanwhile, elements of the 10th Panzer (with the Grossdeutschland Regiment attached) captured the high ground south of Bulson-Thelonne, where it captured more than 40 French guns.

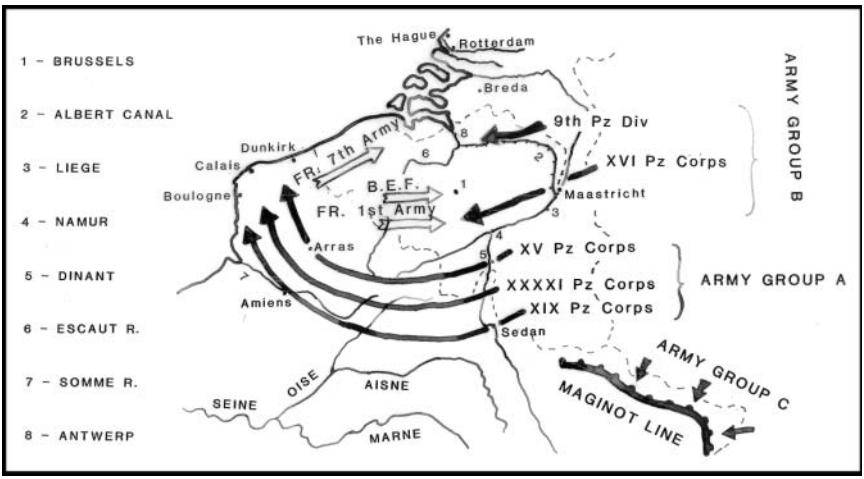
To the east, General Gustav von Wietersheim and his XIV Motorized Corps were heading toward the Sedan bridgehead as rapidly as they could, followed by the infantry divisions of List's 12th Army. Wietersheim's mission was to relieve the 10th Panzer Division and secure the bridgehead until he, in turn, could be relieved by the ''marching'' infantry (that is, the foot soldiers). Guderian continued to push west with the 1st and 2nd Panzer Divisions.

At 1:30 A.M. on May 15, Corap decided to abandon the Meuse line north of Sedan and to make a stand along his prearranged second position. As a result of this maneuver, the 10-mile gap that had resulted from Huntziger's withdrawal increased to 30 miles. Seven of Nazi Germany's 10 panzer divisions poured through the hole and began the great dash to the English Channel. Figure 20.2 shows this maneuver and the subsequent fulfillment of the Manstein Plan, which doomed the Allied armies to defeat.

To his astonishment, General Emmanuel Libaud, the commander of the French XLI Corps, received the order to withdraw just before dawn on May 15. He did as he was told, but his foot soldiers had no chance of reaching their secondary positions against Kleist's rapidly moving units, especially in the daylight. By the end of the day, both the 102nd Garrison and 61st Infantry Divisions had been overrun and destroyed; XLI Corps no longer existed.

Disaster overtook the French forces all along the line. On the evening of May 15, the tank units of the French 2nd Armored Division, coming up from Hirson as ordered, arrived at Signy-l'Abbaye. Its tanks had been shipped by train and were separated from the division's wheeled vehicles (including its fuel trucks), which were coming up by highway. At just the right moment, Werner Kempf's 6th Panzer Division happened to blunder right through the middle of the 2nd Armored. The French division's artillery regiment and most of its tanks were still on flatcars when the panzers barreled into town. Naturally, the Germans made short work of them. The division was scattered,

Figure 20.2
The Manstein Plan Completed



and Brigadier General Albert Bruche and his staff were little more than fugitives. ''From this moment,'' General Georges Lestein wrote later, ''one can say that the 2nd Armored Division no longer existed.''[12]

By nightfall on May 15, the troops of the 29th Motorized Infantry Division (of Wietersheim's corps) were replacing the 10th Panzer Division in the Sedan bridgehead, and Schaal and his panzers were racing after Guderian, who was already far ahead of them. The gap in the French line was now 62 miles wide.

The French High Command still did not know what was happening to it and still did not grasp the German strategy. General Georges was concerned with the possibility that the Germans might try to roll up the Maginot Line. His headquarters was ''completely stupefied'' at 9:45 P.M., when the 9th Army signaled that 100 panzers had reached Montcornet. Meanwhile, Gamelin finally visited Georges' headquarters at La Ferte, was informed of the 9th Army's retreat, and learned something of the extent of the disaster. There was ''the feeling of death in the air,'' Colonel Minart wrote later. The colonel recalled that he ''could see . . . that our command organization was steadily breaking down, and that a paralysis was creeping up, hour by hour.''[13]

By the following morning, word of the disaster had been spread all over Paris by Mademoiselle de Portes (Reynaud's mistress) and others. Still it had not occurred to anyone that Guderian's objective might be the English Channel, not Paris itself. It had not yet dawned on them

that he might be trying to cut off the French 1st and 7th Armies, the Belgian Army, and the B.E.F.—a maneuver that would defeat France and possibly Britain was well, much more surely than the capture of any city—even Paris.

In the meantime, the Germans were having problems of their own.

Ewald von Kleist, who had spent more than 30 years in the cavalry, had been chosen for the top panzer command in the German Army for a number of reasons. For one thing, he was unquestionably competent; for another, he had a streak of Prussian conservatism in him. The High Command feared that the abrasive Guderian might endanger the success of the entire invasion by his rashness; Kleist, they felt, would keep a tight (but not unreasonably tight) reign on his mercurial fellow Prussian—that Kleist's caution would be an effective counterweight to Guderian's sometimes rash and unpredictable behavior.

On the evening of May 15, Kleist became concerned that Guderian was moving forward too rapidly, so he called a halt to the advance of the XIX Panzer Corps. Guderian became angry and went to see Colonel Kurt Zeitzler, the group chief of staff, and then to General von Kleist himself. Kleist wanted to build up the bridgehead before continuing the advance; Guderian took a dim view of this idea, and the argument became heated. Finally, Kleist agreed to allow Guderian a further 24 hours' advance, so that sufficient space could be obtained in the bridgehead to accommodate an additional infantry corps. Guderian left happy, although he had no intension of halting after 24 hours. That night, Guderian turned up at Bouvellemont, woke up the troops of the 1st Panzer Division, and pursued the French into the darkness. Around midnight, the German tankers broke into Avesnes, where French General Bruche had assembled a few remnants of his 1st Armored Division, including 17 tanks. The *Panzertruppen* destroyed 14 of these tanks and scattered the survivors once more. About the same time, the vanguard of Rommel's 7th Panzer Division seized Vervins, which the headquarters of the French 9th Army had evacuated less than an hour before.

On May 16, Heinz Guderian and the XIX Panzer Corps turned west from Sedan toward the sea, not south, behind the Maginot Line, or southwest toward Paris, as the French expected. From a military point of view, the Battle of the Meuse was now over. It had been a magnificent, almost classic, victory for German arms, and it presented the officers of the day and military historians of today with a number of lessons.

The Germans had won a tremendous victory for a number of reasons. First, the High Command had achieved complete strategic surprise. Second, Kleist had achieved complete tactical surprise by attacking across the Meuse on the afternoon of the 13th, instead of

waiting for his heavy artillery and infantry, which would not have arrived until the 15th or 16th. Third, the French obsession with containing the Germans instead of counterattacking left the initiative completely in the hands of Guderian and others, and they were not slow in taking advantage of it. Fourth, the French command system broke down entirely, especially with regard to the application of air power. Fifth, French morale collapsed in the face of the Luftwaffe's air attacks. Finally, and perhaps most important, the French leadership had ignored the lessons of Poland and simply did not believe that such rapid operations were possible. The Battle of the Meuse changed all of that. From this point on, the term *blitzkrieg* (literally, ''lightning war'') became a household word, and many people began to believe that the Wehrmacht was invincible. Unfortunately for Germany, some of these people were German leaders, who consequently failed to prepare for a war in depth. Such preparations certainly did not seem necessary on May 16, 1940, as the panzers turned west, and the next phase of the campaign began.

Meanwhile, to the north, the main Allied armies fought well and restricted Reichenau to a few minor gains. Then, at nightfall on May 15, the Anglo-French generals learned the extent of the disaster that had befallen the 9th Army. Only then did they begin to retreat, but without any signs of the disintegration and panic that was common further south. The retreat of May 15–16 was nevertheless a bitter one for the Belgians, for it doomed Brussels, Antwerp, and Namur. Belgian Prime Minister Hubert Pierlot, Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, Defense Minister Henri Denis, and King Leopold III fled the capital on May 16. That same day, much to General Reichenau's disgust, OKH took Erich Hoepner's XVI Panzer Corps away from him and transferred it to Army Group A, where it was needed to secure the 62-mile Panzer Corridor. Reichenau nevertheless succeeded in capturing Brussels the following day and continued to faithfully execute his primary mission: put relentless pressure on the Belgian, French, and British forces in his area, pin them down, and sap their strength, and do so at a time when they were desperately needed to stabilize the 9th Army to the south.

THE DASH TO THE CHANNEL

By nightfall of May 15–16, the newly committed 6th French Army—which was given only one extant division—was already in full retreat toward the Aisne River, where its commander, Lieutenant General Robert Touchon, hoped to establish a defensive line. General Alphones Georges, the commander-in-chief, Allied Forces, Northwest France, was now on the verge of a nervous collapse. He nevertheless ordered the 9th Army (now under General Giraud) to set up a containment line

on the Oise River. The 9th Army, however, had only two divisions left: the 9th Motorized and the scattered remnants of the 2nd Armored. Obviously, it could not cover more than 50 miles of frontage. That evening, Reinhardt's rapidly moving XXXXI Panzer stormed across the river and took the villages of Vervins and Guise, ending all hope of holding the Wehrmacht on the Oise. That night, Rommel caught the remnants of the French 1st Armored Division trying to cross the Avesnes. By daylight it, too, had been erased from existence.

At 11 A.M. on May 16, the cabinet met in Paris, and Reynaud informed the shocked politicians that not a single regiment stood between Paris and the panzers. Within the hour, orders were given to evacuate the seat of government to Tours. The departure time was set for 4 P.M. That afternoon, tell-tale smoke appeared behind the foreign ministry: the archives and secret papers were being burned.

On May 16, the fast-moving panzers surrounded the French 18th Infantry Division at Beaumont and trapped the remnants of his 1st Light Cavalry Division at Rance. Both were promptly swamped by the panzers. Elements of the 18th Infantry managed to break out and reach safety, but the division was finished as a combat force.

As the panzers raced west, the French II Corps (of the French 1st Army) took up a hook-shaped defensive position on the Sambre, facing south. At the same time, the French 2nd Army took up a similar position at Montmefact, facing north. In between these two ''gate-post'' positions was a 62-mile gap (the Panzer Corridor). Soon it would extend more than 125 miles, from Sedan to the sea. On its southern flank, General Robert Touchon's 6th Army linked up with the bent left flank of the 2nd Army. Eventually, the headquarters of the French 7th Army (now under General Aubert Frere) would be brought down from Belgium to join the 6th Army's left, to extend the French southern flank to the sea. There were, however, no large-scale counterattacks and no major attempts to close the Panzer Corridor from the south. The entire French command seemed stunned by their defeat.

To the north, on May 15 and 16, the French 5th Motorized Division (of the II Corps) tried to escape to the fortifications at Maubeuge, in French territory, closely pursued by the 5th Panzer Division. When it arrived there on the morning of May 17, it only had 1,000 men—all that was left of the French II Corps. Meanwhile, Erwin Rommel and his Ghost Division overran and destroyed the 4th North African Division.

On the night of May 16–17, Guderian informed panzer group headquarters of the day's advance and told them in an offhand manner that he planned to continue his drive the following morning. It never occurred to Guderian that Kleist had only agreed to a further advance of 24 hours and that those orders were still in affect. To Kleist,

however, Guderian's report represented insubordination. He signaled XIX Panzer Corps to halt at once and ordered Guderian to report to him at the corps' forward airstrip at 7 A.M.

No sooner had General von Kleist gotten out of his airplane than he began to violently reprimand Guderian for disobeying orders. Guderian, who also had a temper, demanded to be relieved of his command. Kleist was ''momentarily taken aback,''[14] but was certainly not the type of man to back down from a willful subordinate, just because he threatened to resign; rather, Kleist ordered Guderian to turn the corps over to its most senior general and ended the conversation.

Guderian returned to his headquarters, handed the XIX Panzer over to General Veiel, and wired von Rundstedt that he would fly to army group headquarters early that afternoon, to make a report on what had happened. Rundstedt replied almost at once: Guderian was to remain at his headquarters and await the arrival of Colonel General Wilhelm List, the commander of the 12th Army, who had been ordered to investigate and to clear the matter up. Until that time, all units were to remain where they were.

Early in the afternoon of May 17, General List arrived. He told Guderian that the halt order had come from Hitler and OKH—not Kleist. (Apparently von Kleist did not feel it necessary to reveal the sources of Guderian's orders to him.) List also told Guderian that he would not be allowed to resign his command. He said that he understood Guderian's desire to advance, but the OKH order must be obeyed; even so, the army group would allow XIX Panzer to conduct a ''reconnaissance-in-force,'' although corps headquarters would remain where it was.

Guderian accepted this formula, which allowed him to continue his advance under the guise of a reconnaissance-in-force. The corps headquarters remained at Soize, while Guderian continued to direct the advance from a forward CP. Wire was lain between the regular and advanced headquarters, so that Guderian could communicate with his staff without having his messages intercepted by OKH or OKW. That evening, XIX Panzer Corps established a bridgehead across the Oise near Moy—a position 70 miles from Sedan.

Heinz Guderian, in fact, knew nothing of the severe ''crisis of nerves'' that had once again seized Adolf Hitler, just as it had during the critical days during the Battle of Narvik. Walter von Brauchitsch and Franz Halder, however, did know. ''An unpleasant day,'' the chief of the General Staff recorded in his diary. ''The Fuehrer is terribly nervous. Frightened by his own success, he is afraid to take any chance and would rather pull the reins on us. Puts forward the excuse that it is all because of his concern for the left flank!''[15]

It was, in fact, Hitler's nervousness that had caused Kleist to issue the halt order in the first place.

While Guderian's units were temporarily stopped, Colonel Charles de Gaulle, the recently appointed commander of the French 4th Armored Division, was thrown into the breach. He was ordered to delay the German advance to the east between the Aisne and the Ailette until Touchon's 6th Army could come up and bar Guderian's way to Paris. De Gaulle, however, realized that the tank was an offensive weapon and, deciding that the best defense was an effective offensive, launched a pair of counterattacks. Because of the hasty nature of its formation, de Gaulle's division, which controlled 150 tanks, was in poor condition. One battalion, for example, was trained for service with light tanks, but it had been equipped with heavy B tanks instead. It had never been on a tactical maneuver and had been allowed to fire only one practice shell per crew from its 75-millimeter main battle guns. The 4th Armored Division had no air support and virtually no help from the infantry.

For political reasons, much was made after the war of de Gaulle's counterattacks and how he put a fright into the Germans. General von Kleist was so frightened that he did not even know that the French had counterattacked. ''Guderian dealt with them without bothering me,'' he explained later, ''and I did not hear about them [de Gaulle's counterattack] till the day after.''[16] The 4th Armored did, in fact, destroy about 20 panzers, but was promptly attacked itself, pounded by Stukas, and nearly encircled. It escaped during the night, after losing a third of its troops and all of its 25-millimeter anti-tank guns. The German advance was never in any danger. But, to de Gaulle's credit, at least he attacked and took energetic action to try to stem the German tide, even though the forces as his disposal were woefully inadequate for such a task.

May 18 was another day of victory for the German Army and another day of desperation and panic in Paris and at Hitler's headquarters. ''The Fuehrer unaccountably keeps worrying about the south flank,'' Halder noted in his diary. ''He rages and screams that we are on the best way to ruin the whole campaign and that we are leading up to a defeat. He won't have any part of continuing the operation in the westward direction.'' After ''a most unpleasant discussion,'' Brauchitsch and Halder finally persuaded Hitler to allow the spearheads to continue driving southwest.[17]

At dawn, the panzer divisions, now freed by the High Command, advanced rapidly. Now that they smelled the sea, some tank units gained up to 30 miles a day. They slashed across the Sambre Canal, took LaCateau, and captured Amiens, Cambrai, Saint-Quentin, and Peronne. At 10 P.M., Reinhardt's panzers attacked LeCatelet and routed the headquarters units of the 9th Army. General Giraud only just managed to escape, alone, by heading across the countryside on foot. He

was captured the following morning by a panzer detachment or a German field kitchen unit, depending on which source one chooses to believe. In either case, he was captured, and the French 9th Army no longer existed.

That night in Paris, Reynaud reshuffled his cabinet and named 84-year-old Marshal Henri Philippe Petain vice premier. Reynaud took the national defense portfolio himself and transferred Daladier to the ministry of foreign affairs.

The following day, ''the rendezvous of May 19'' occurred, when 9 of Germany's 10 panzer divisions met up along the Gambrai-Peronne-Ham line for the final push to the sea. That morning they continued to advance along the Somme, between Cambrai and St. Quentin, toward the Channel. Guderian, who had received freedom of maneuver ''at last,'' sent the 1st Panzer Division toward Amiens, with orders to establish a bridgehead on the southern bank of the Somme as soon as possible. The 2nd Panzer headed toward Abbeville to establish a similar bridgehead and to clear the area between Abbeville and the sea of enemy troops.

On the evening of May 19, the 68-year-old General Gamelin was relieved of his command. He was replaced by 73-year-old Maxime Weygand. Reynaud had recalled General Weygand from Syria, where he had commanded the Army of the Eastern Mediterranean, on May 17. Upon assuming command, Weygand's first act was to go to bed; however, in the days ahead, he would prove to be very much Gamelin's superior as a military commander, although he was certainly not up to the standard currently being set by the Germans.

That morning, five panzer divisions approached the Canal du Nord, only 50 miles from Abbeville, and swept aside the two British territorial divisions that had been assigned the hopeless task of defending it. That afternoon, Lord Gort ordered the air components of the B.E.F. back to the United Kingdom and was openly discussing the possibility of evacuating his ground forces with the War Office. The following day, May 20, the panzers rolled through the communications zone of the B.E.F. Elements of the 8th Panzer Division took Cambrai and pushed toward Bapaume, while the division's tank regiment barreled down on the British 70th Infantry Brigade. By the end of the day, the 70th was down to a strength of 14 officers and 219 men. To the south, at Amiens, Colonel Balck's 1st Rifle Regiment crossed the Somme, overwhelmed the Royal West Kent Battalion and took Amiens, destroying the 7th Royal Sussex Battalion (of the 37th Brigade) in the process. By the end of the day, Balck had established a bridgehead four miles deep on the southern bank. That same afternoon, the 2nd Panzer Division attacked Abbeville and overwhelmed the British 35th Infantry Brigade. The city fell at 7 P.M. and only remnants of the 35th Brigade

managed to escape across the Somme.[18] Meanwhile, Major Spitta's battalion of the 2nd Panzer Brigade reached the English Channel at Noyelles at dusk. The Manstein Plan had worked just like its creator said it would. Army Group 1, along with France's best divisions, was completely cut off with its back to the sea, as was the bulk of the B.E.F. and the surviving regiments of the Belgian Army.

NOTES

1. General Bouffet was killed before the campaign ended.
2. Erwin Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, B. H. Liddell Hart, ed. (1953), p. 7 (hereafter cited as the Rommel Papers).
3. Steinkeller was one of the up-and-coming young officers in the Wehrmacht. Born in Deutsch Krone, East Prussia, in 1896, he joined the Imperial Army when World War I broke out and served with the 3rd Ulan Regiment. Discharged in 1919, he returned to active duty in 1934 and became adjutant of the XV Panzer Corps in 1938. He led the 7th Motorcycle in Poland and Russia (1940–42) and became commander of the 7th Panzer Grenadier Regiment from May 1, 1942, until January 1944. After attending a short divisional commanders course, he assumed command of the 60th Panzer Grenadier Division on the Eastern Front on April 3, 1944. Promoted to major general on June 1, he was captured on July 8, 1944, and remained in Soviet prisons until 1955. He settled in Hanover after the war and died in 1981, at the age of 85.
4. Gouhard, p. 164.
5. Ibid., p. 122.
6. Ibid., p. 127, citing Grandsard, *Le 10 Corps d'Armee dans la Bataille*.
7. Guderian, p. 80.
8. Gouhard, p. 126.
9. Ibid., p. 136.
10. Guderian, p 82.
11. Benoist-Mechin, p. 92.
12. Gouhard, pp. 185–86.
13. Ibid., pp. 100–101.
14. Guderian, p. 87.
15. Halder Diaries, May 17, 1940.
16. Benoist-Mechin, p. 96.
17. Halder Diaries, May 18, 1940.
18. L. E. Ellis, *The War in France and Flanders, 1939–1940* (1953), p. 81 (hereafter cited as Ellis).

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CHAPTER XXI

THE BATTLE OF THE DUNKIRK POCKET

Hitler's ''crisis of nerves'' passed and was replaced with unbounded joy when he learned that the pocket—soon to be known as the Dunkirk Pocket—had been closed, and he was brimming over with praise for the army and its leaders. The next day, May 21, he was startled again, however, when two British infantry divisions and the 1st Army Tank Brigade counterattacked against Rommel's 7th Panzer Division and the Totenkopf (Death's Head) SS Motorized Division (SS-TK). The British strike force had only 58 Mark Is, armed only with machine guns, and 16 heavy Matilda infantry tanks, but the 30-ton Matildas were superior to any German tank in armored protection and firepower. The right-hand column took Berneville and soon ran into Colonel Georg von Bismarck's 7th Rifle Regiment, the 1st SS-TK Regiment, and the tank destroyer battalion of the Totenkopf Division, whose shells were unable to penetrate the British tanks. Several SS gun crews were crushed to death under the treads of the Matildas, which were finally brought to a halt by the gunners of the SS-TK artillery regiment, who fired over open sights. Once they were pinned down, the British forces were bombed repeatedly by Stukas. Contrary to the reports of certain historians, the former concentration camp guards did not panic during the British attack; in fact, most of their wounded were hit in the lungs and stomach, because they ran toward the British tanks, trying to knock them out with hand grenades—a brave maneuver, but not a particularly bright one. In his excellent history of the Totenkopf Division, Charles W. Syndor, Jr., concluded that, in general, the division ''performed commendably'' during the attack.[1]

The British left-hand column hit the 6th Rifle Regiment and initially experienced greater success. Once again, the German 37-millimeter

anti-tank guns could not penetrate the thick frontal armor on the British infantry tanks. One Matilda was hit 14 times. They were finally halted by the combined firepower of the 78th Motorized Artillery Regiment, the 86th Light Anti-Tank Battalion (lent to the 7th Panzer by the 4th Army), and elements of the 59th and 23rd Anti-Aircraft Regiments, all firing under the personal supervision of General Rommel.[2] Colonel Rothenburg's 25th Panzer Regiment then launched a counterattack and forced the British armor nearly back to its starting line. By the end of the day, the 7th Panzer Division had lost 378 men killed, wounded, and missing, as well as nine medium and several light tanks. Theodor Eicke's SS-TK lost 39 killed, 66 wounded, and two missing.

Both von Kleist and von Kluge were somewhat shaken by the surprisingly aggressive British reaction at Arras. Kluge wanted to delay any further advances until the situation was cleared up and Rundstedt, who wanted to conserve his strength, agreed. The XIX Panzer Corps War Diary records that the British counterattack ''apparently created nervousness throughout the entire [Kleist] group area.''[3]

But it went farther than that. Both Hitler and Rundstedt took the attack as an indication that Army Group A had advanced too far, too fast, and needed to establish an adequate defense on the flanks of the Panzer Corridor. Rundstedt therefore ordered Kleist to halt his drive on the Channel ports until the fighting around Arras had been resolved. Ewald von Kleist took the 10th Panzer Division from XIX Panzer Corps and placed it in group reserve. Guderian had earmarked the 10th Panzer for an advance on Dunkirk. This would not be immediately possible.

Even after the Arras counterattack, Rundstedt had seven panzer, six motorized, and four infantry divisions in position to launch an attack into the rear of the B.E.F. At that time, Lord Gort had only two infantry divisions and a few miscellaneous units to protect his right rear. Because it halted the panzers, therefore, the counterattack at Arras represents a significant victory for the British, even though it was undoubtedly a tactical defeat.

Heinz Guderian wasted most of May 21 waiting for orders. It was almost nightfall when he finally received permission to advance on the Channel ports. The 2nd Panzer moved out rapidly, caught the French 21st Infantry Division detraining, and routed it. By 5 P.M. it was on the outskirts of Boulogne, where it brushed with the British 20th Guards Brigade, which had just arrived in the port city, less than 24 hours after it had been alerted for overseas service. The 3rd Royal Tank Regiment (R.T.R.) was supposed to join it in the defense of Boulogne, but the panzers moved too rapidly, and it never disembarked.

The Germans met heavy resistance inside Boulogne. Neither the main battle guns of the tanks nor the artillery could breach the old

town walls; at last they brought up a 88-millimeter anti-aircraft gun near the cathedral and broke down the barrier; simultaneously, they attacked the Boulogne perimeter from three sides, with the infantry entering the city via scaling ladder, using tactics similar to those their ancestors had employed during the Middle Ages. The street fighting continued for days and the city did not surrender until the morning of May 25. Much of the French 21st Infantry Division was also captured.

Meanwhile, Lord Gort ordered a general withdrawal from the Arras sector. His strike force had lost more than half of its tanks; however, its retreat increased the gap between the northern pocket and the rest of France from 19 to 44 miles.

While the 2nd Panzer closed in on Boulogne, the British landed the 3rd R.T.R., a rifle battalion, and a few miscellaneous units at Calais. The entire force was placed under the command of the Headquarters, 30th British Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Claude N. Nicholson). The 3rd R.T.R. was equipped with 21 light and 27 cruiser tanks.

By the afternoon of May 23, Kleist had returned the 10th Panzer Division to Guderian. The dashing panzer leader quickly sent the 10th Panzer to strike Calais from the south, while Kirchner's 1st Panzer cut off the garrison's escape route to the north. Kirchner quickly blocked the Calais-Dunkirk Road, which led to a fierce battle during the night of May 23–24. The British troops from Calais were trying to deliver 350,000 badly needed rations to the Dunkirk beachhead, but they were unable to push the 1st Panzer off the highway. By the time the 3rd R.T.R. retreated, it was down to nine cruisers and 12 light tanks. General Kirchner pursued them closely and soon brought Calais under heavy shell fire, while smaller elements of the division advanced to the north, toward Dunkirk.

By the afternoon of May 24, elements of the 1st and 10th Panzer Divisions were attacking Calais from three sides with infantry and tanks. By nightfall, the vanguards of the 1st Panzer Division (with Sepp Dietrich's SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler attached) were only 12 miles from Dunkirk. The only forces defending the city were the remnants of the French 12th Infantry Division and the French 272nd Half-Brigade. If the 1st and 10th Panzers were freed and struck at Dunkirk, no one could stop them, and 400,000 Allied troops (excluding the 20 extant divisions of the Belgian Army) would be completely surrounded. It was therefore essential for Nicholson to buy as much time as he could, which is exactly what he did. Even with the 10th Panzer pinned down, however, it seemed unlikely that Dunkirk could be saved.

THE HALT ORDER

On May 23, Hermann Goering learned that the panzers were almost in Dunkirk. He suddenly became very excited, banged the table with

his fist, and cried, ''I must talk to the Fuehrer immediately. This is a special job for the Luftwaffe.''[4] He went to Hitler and convinced him that the Air Force alone could destroy the B.E.F. Jodl protested at once, but Hitler brushed aside his objections. Kesselring also objected, as did Hans Jeschonnek and Wolfram von Richthofen. Their reasons were very good. Their bases were too far from Dunkirk, the British Spitfire was superior to the Me-109, and the Stuka dive-bombers were extremely vulnerable to British fighters, especially immediately after they dived. Finally, the constant operations had taken their toll; combat losses had not been light, the airplanes were in desperate need of maintenance, and only about half of them were operational.

May 24 was another disastrous day for the Western Allies. In the Belgian sector, von Reichenau broke through King Leopold's line and pushed across the Lys with four divisions. Two Belgian divisions counterattacked and temporarily sealed off the breakthrough, but Stukas pulverized them and eventually forced them to retreat toward Ypres and Roules. This retreat exposed the British left flank, so Gort was forced to retreat to the north as well. By now, both OKH and OKW sensed that they had an annihilating victory within their grasp. Guderian had already decided to bypass Calais and head straight for Dunkirk, while General von Brauchitsch suggested a large-scale panzer offensive, whose objective would be to cut off the retreat of the Anglo-French Army Group 1. Even Keitel supported him. ''The greatest encirclement battle in history must end in the annihilation of all of the British, French and Belgian forces still fighting in Flanders,'' he declared.[5]

Rundstedt, however, rejected the planned offensive, and he was backed up by Adolf Hitler. Both considered the battle won and escape impossible. At 11:30 A.M., Hitler visited Rundstedt's headquarters at Charleville and, after consulting with the commander-in-chief of Army Group A, ordered the panzer divisions to halt on the southern banks of the nearest canal. To the amazement of his generals, Hitler ended the meeting by expressing his admiration for the British Empire at considerable length. He stated that he felt its continued existence was useful to civilization and later implied that he felt the British would agree to peace terms more easily if they were not totally humiliated.

If he really believed this—and apparently he did—he did not know the British well.

Most of his generals were more astute. Franz Halder wanted Rundstedt's Army Group A to hammer Army Group 1 to pieces on an anvil formed by Bock's Army Group B. Now the situation was reversed. Army Group A—with nine of Germany's 10 panzer divisions—was halted 12 miles from Dunkirk. Army Group B, which was still 34 miles away and facing an unbroken front, had only infantry units. Colonel

von Lossberg begged Jodl to try to get the decision reversed, but the chief of operations at OKW refused to do so, stating that the war was already won, and that the Luftwaffe could finish things more economically. Likewise, Keitel refused to risk incurring the wrath of the Fuehrer by protesting his order. Colonel Adolf Heusinger, the chief of operations at OKH, was furious. ''What is the meaning of this insane order?'' he cried. ''Are we going to build golden bridges for the British? . . . This is ridicious!''[6]

Ridiculous it may have been, but the order was relayed to the units at 8:20 P.M. General von Kleist initially tried to ignore it and halted only after he received a second, more strongly worded order (from OKH), after he ignored the first one (from Rundstedt). Sepp Dietrich, the SS commander, flat out disobeyed the order, crossed the Aa Canal, and seized the commanding position of Mont Watten on the west bank. After the war, Gerd von Rundstedt severely criticized Hitler for issuing the halt order, despite the fact that he approved the idea at the time and Hitler only issued the order after conferring with him; Hitler, in fact, deliberately sought out Rundstedt's advise on the matter, and the two had been in complete agreement at the time.

Rundstedt's motivations for wanting to halt were based on his tank strength. Panzer Group Kleist reported that less than 50 percent of its original tank strength was fit for operations. Many of the losses were breakdowns, not battle casualties, but they were still out of action, and this alarmed the conservative Rundstedt, who wanted to conserve his strength for the second phase of the campaign—the conquest of the rest of France.

Hitler's motivations are less clear. At 5 P.M. on May 25, while the panzer troops rested or performed badly needed maintenance on their vehicles, Reichenau's 6th Army broke through the Belgian front on the Lys and advanced toward Ypres, threatening to cut the Belgian Army and the B.E.F. off from the coast. Because he knew the German dispositions from a captured dispatch, Gort sent his 5th and 50th Infantry Divisions to Ypres, while French General Georges Blanchard sent the 2nd Light Mechanized Division to the same sector.[7] The three divisions plugged the gap in the Belgian front between Menin and Ypres. Fedor von Bock was denied his decisive breakthrough and the Allied front was saved—but barely. Bock was not through, however. That night, he reinforced 6th Army with the X Corps, as well as the 61st Infantry Division, and ordered Reichenau to keep up the pressure. Meanwhile, the German attacks continued to reduce Calais and, by the end of the day, the 3rd Royal Tank Regiment had only three tanks left. It was now too late to evacuate the 30th Infantry Brigade. The following afternoon, the German infantry overran the Citadel and captured Brigadier Nicholson and his staff. One by one the Allied combat groups were overcome,

and the last surrendered that evening. Guderian's troops took 20,000 prisoners, including 3,000 to 4,000 British. The sacrifice of the 30th Infantry and 3rd R.T.R., however, had not been in vain. Coupled with Hitler's order to stop the panzers, they had bought Lord Gort enough time to bring the British III Corps south, to establish a solid front between Calais and Dunkirk. The Allies still had one port left.

Meanwhile, back at Army Group A Headquarters, Colonel General von Rundstedt was having second thoughts. At about 1:30 P.M., he telephoned Hitler and asked that the panzers be allowed to advance again. Hitler gave his consent later that afternoon, but it was already too late—von Kleist's troops had lost their momentum. The complete annihilation of the forces in the Dunkirk Pocket was no longer possible.

On the Allied side of the line, the situation grew even more desperate. The 4th, 5th, and 7th Panzer Divisions began to advance again and forced their way across the Bassee Canal. Rommel cut the Lille-Armentieres Road at Lomme, severing the main line of retreat of the French 1st Army, which was under frontal attack from Kluge's 4th Army. Meanwhile, three German infantry divisions attacked the British 5th and 50th Infantry Divisions (Frankforce) near Ypres, while other 6th Army divisions rocked the Belgian Army. Soon a major gap was driven between the Belgians at Zonnebeke and the II British Corps at Ypres. General Sir Alan Brooke, the British corps commander, had to reinforce Frankforce with much of the lst British Division and the bulk of the corps artillery. This prevented a German breakthrough, and the gap between the B.E.F. and the Belgian Army was narrowed, but not closed, and both the British and Belgians had committed their last reserves. In London, at 7 P.M. that evening, the British Admiralty ordered Vice Admiral Sir Bertram H. Ramsay, the Flag Officer, Dover, to commerce Operation Dynamo—the evacuation of the B.E.F. At the time, it was estimated that 45,000 British troops might be rescued.

On May 27, the Luftwaffe bombed Dunkirk 12 times. Army Group A continued to compress the French 1st Army's salient near Lille, while Kleist attacked the French and British south of Dunkirk. By nightfall, he had pushed to within four miles of the city. Meanwhile, Reichenau attacked again and broke through the Belgian line in three places. Without reserves, the king decided that he had no choice but to capitulate. At 3:30 P.M., he met with Admiral Sir Roger Keyes and other members of the British and French military missions and informed them that he intended to ask for an armistice at midnight.

Also on May 27, the 14th Company of the 2nd Totenkopf Infantry Regiment clashed with about 100 men from the 2nd Royal Norfolk Battalion in a farmhouse near the village of La Paradis. The SS men quickly surrounded the house and a small but sharp battle raged for about an hour, during which several of the former concentration camp

guards were killed or wounded. The Norfolks, however, soon ran out of ammunition and surrendered, expecting to be made prisoners of war; instead, SS Captain Fritz Knoechlein had them lined up against the barn wall and mowed down with heavy machine guns. Those who showed the slightest signs of life were then bayoneted. Miraculously, two badly wounded British privates survived. Later they gave themselves up to the 251st Infantry Division, where they received medical attention and were treated correctly. One of them was even repatriated to England in 1943, due to his wounds. After the war they testified against Knoecklein, who was tried before a British military tribunal and hanged as a war criminal.

''The incident at Le Paradis was more than just an isolated act of individual brutality,'' Syndor wrote later. ''The urge to massacre defenseless prisoners seems to have been a natural and logical byproduct of the poisonous climate of the fanaticism that had existed in the SS Totenkopfdivision since its creation.''[8]

At 5 P.M., a Belgian envoy set out for the headquarters of the 6th Army. He returned at 10 P.M. with Germany's reply: Hitler demanded unconditional surrender. Leopold agreed to these terms, and, at 12:20 A.M. on May 28, the Belgian Army capitulated to the Wehrmacht. Reichenau signed for the Germans, and General Olivier-Jules Desrousseaux, the deputy chief of the Belgian General Staff, signed for King Leopold. Half a million Belgian soldiers lay down their arms.

With the Belgian surrender, disaster overtook the French on May 28. The entire area north of the Lys was now open to the Germans, and only two divisions of the 1st French Army plus the Cavalry Corps were in a position to escape. Hoth's panzer corps quickly completed the encirclement of the French 1st Army, and six French divisions were surrounded in the Lille area. They held out until June 1, tying down four German infantry divisions, as well as the XV Panzer Corps. Meanwhile, the troops of the 3rd Panzer Division and the SS-TK Division pushed past St. Venant, and by the end of the day, the 2nd British Infantry Division was below the normal strength of a peacetime brigade and had lost most of its combat value. It withdrew into the Dunkirk bridgehead that night.

''The roads to the coast presented an astonishing spectacle in those days,'' Major Ellis wrote later, ''when motor and horse-drawn transport of the two armies, refugees on foot, stragglers, and the fragments of the units, and the withdrawing divisions all sought to find a way northwards. In the roadside fields, burning equipment and abandoned stores heightened the appearance of disintegration.''[9]

That same day, May 28, Guderian received another order to halt. Hitler wanted to withdraw his panzers in preparation for the major offensive south of the Somme—the finishing blow against France.

Although he later became a severe critic of this order, Guderian is quoted in the XIX Panzer Corps War Diary as advising Kurt Zeitzler, Kleist's chief of staff, that a tank attack here would be pointless, due to the marshy nature of the ground.[10] The following day, Guderian's corps was relieved by the XIV Motorized Corps. Major General Fuller, the distinguished British historian, later agreed with the logic behind Hitler's second halt order, just as Guderian did (at the time). It had rained heavily on May 26 and 27, and it had made the low Flanders terrain difficult for armored operations. Also, by May 28, Kleist's panzer group had lost about half of its tanks, and Hoth's corps had lost one-third of its panzers. ''The halt order was originally a sensible precaution, a logical military procedure'' in view of the battles to be fought later, Deighton wrote.[11] We know now, with the benefit of hindsight, that it was the wrong decision, but it was certainly much more justifiable than the first halt order. At the time, only Colonel General von Brauchitsch, the normally conservative commander-in-chief of the Army, objected; he wanted to continue to use the panzer units at Dunkirk, but was overruled. Of course, neither Hitler nor any of his advisors could guess that more than 300,000 men would escape to England via Dunkirk. Immediately after the battle, Kesselring noted candidly, ''Even 100,000 we believed to be well above the mark.''[12]

The British evacuation of Dunkirk began on May 26. The Anglo-French infantry units managed to check the infantry units of the Wehrmacht, while the VIII Air Corps and the rest of the 2nd Air Fleet experienced problems with fog, which limited air operations on May 28, 29, and 30. Just as their commanders predicted, they were unable to prevent the B.E.F. from evacuating its troops.

The last men were evacuated during the night of June 3–4, leaving only elements of the French XVI Corps in the pocket. It was finally finished off on June 4. Major General Maurice Beaufrere surrendered the last French forces to Lieutenant General Friedrich-Karl Cranz, the commander of the 18th Infantry Division of Kuechler's Army. Another 40,000 French soldiers marched into the prisoner-of-war camps.

Operation Dynamo had cost the Royal Navy 228 ships sunk and 45 badly damaged (excluding the smaller vessels). The Royal Air Force lost 177 airplanes destroyed or damaged, versus 240 for the Luftwaffe. Because they had abandoned their old World War I fighter formations and adopted tactics similar to those of the Germans, Dunkirk was the first air battle of the war in which the British held their own with the Luftwaffe. It would not be the last, but this fact was lost on Goering's General Staff, which was carried away by the magnitude on its impressive victories in France and Belgium.

During the first phase of the French campaign, the Wehrmacht reported on June 4, an estimated 1.2 million prisoners had been

captured, along with enough arms and equipment to outfit 75 to 80 divisions. All 24 Belgian Army divisions were destroyed; all nine Dutch divisions were destroyed; 9 of the 10 British divisions were destroyed or rendered unfit for combat; 24 French infantry divisions were destroyed; two of France's three light cavalry divisions were destroyed; all three French light mechanized divisions were destroyed; one French armored division was completely destroyed; and the remaining three French armored divisions were decimated. With the B.E.F. eliminated and the best of the French divisions destroyed, Hitler's legions now turned their attention to the south, where General Weygand was desperately trying to form some type of line, to stem the German tide. If he were not successful in this effort, everyone knew, even Paris would fall into German hands, and France could not be saved.

NOTES

1. Charles W. Snydor, Jr., *Soldiers of Destruction* (1977), p. 96 (hereafter cited as Snydor).
2. See the Rommel Papers, pp. 31–32, for Rommel's description of this battle.
3. Ellis, p. 96.
4. Gouhard, pp. 231–32.
5. Benoist-Mechin, p. 144.
6. Gouhard, p. 230.
7. Despite his successful performance in the evacuation of Dunkirk, Field Marshal Lord Gort (1886–1946) never held another major command. He had been chief of the Imperial General Staff from 1937 to 1939.
8. Snydor, p. 107.
9. Ellis, pp. 210–11.
10. Deighton, p. 264.
11. Ibid.
12. Kesselring, p. 59.

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CHAPTER XXII
THE FALL OF FRANCE

More than a week before the Battle of the Dunkirk Pocket ended, Halder and his OKH staff were hard at work on plans for the second (and final) phase of the campaign: the capture of Paris and the total destruction of the once mighty French Army.

Halder planned to concentrate nearly all of the armor along the Somme (west of Paris) under Headquarters, Army Group B. Army Group A (Rundstedt) would concentrate along the Aisne with three infantry armies. Bock (on the German right flank) would lead off the offensive by driving south, then turn southeast, behind the French divisions defending Paris; meanwhile, Rundstedt would drive southwest, forming a huge pocket north of the French capital. Hitler, however, objected to committing all of the panzers west of Paris or even launching the main attack there. As a result, when Halder re-presented his Plan *Rot* (Red) to the Fuehrer on May 25, it called for the majority of the armor to concentrate east of Paris, although Bock's Army Group B would still have a considerable panzer force. Although Hitler received Halder in a ''cool, almost hostile manner,'' he approved the plan.[1]

Army Group B, which deployed from the mouth of the Somme to south of Laon, included (right to left) the following:

- Kluge's 4th Army, which included Hoth's XV Panzer Corps (5th Panzer, 7th Panzer, and 2nd Motorized Divisions), deployed from the coast to Amiens;
- Reichenau's 6th Army (Bock's strongest) extended from Amiens to the Oise. It included von Kleist's Panzer Group, which consisted of Wietersheim's XIV Motorized Corps (9th Panzer, 10th Panzer, and 13th Motorized Divisions, and the Grossdeutschland Motorized Infantry Regiment) and Hoepner's XVI Panzer Corps (3rd Panzer, 4th Panzer, and SS-VT Motorized Divisions, as well as the SS-LAH); and

- Strauss's 9th Army positioned its units from the Oise (south of Laon) to the Aisne, where it linked up with the 16th Army on the right flank of Army Group A. Kuechler's 18th Army, which was also part of Army Group B, was initially held in reserve.

Army Group A deployed three armies on the frontlines. They were as follows:

- Weichs's 2nd Army from Chemin des Dames to Rethel;
- List's 12th Army, from Rethel to the left bank of the Meuse. It included the newly formed Panzer Group Guderian, which consisted of Schmidt's XXXIX Panzer Corps (lst Panzer, 2nd Panzer, and 29th Motorized Divisions) and Reinhardt's XXXXI Panzer Corps (6th Panzer, 8th Panzer, and 20th Motorized Division), all in reserve along the Aisne, facing the hills of Champagne; and
- Busch's 16th Army, from the right bank of the Meuse to Montmedy.

Ritter von Leeb's Army Group C faced the Maginot Line, from Montmedy to Belford Gap. It controlled of the 1st Army (von Witzleben) from Montmedy to the Rhine and Dollmann's much weaker 7th Army, which occupied positions along the Rhine to the Swiss frontier.

Kesselring's 2nd Air Fleet was to support Army Group B, while Sperrle's 3rd flew in support of A and C.

In total, OKH had some 137 divisions on or near the frontlines. They faced 43 French infantry divisions, three depleted armored divisions, the remnants of three cavalry divisions, and the equivalent of 13 fortress divisions on the Maginot Line. There were the equivalent of three British divisions still in France as well. The best Allied divisions, however, were gone.

Meanwhile, the 73-year-old French commander-in-chief, Weygand, energetically prepared for a battle in which he knew that the odds were very heavy against him. ''The battle on which the fate of the country depends,'' he wrote in his order of May 25, ''Will be fought without thought of withdrawal, from the positions that we now occupy.... The whole area behind the principal line is to be organized as deeply as possible into a quadrillage [checkerboard] of resistance centers, especially along the main roads.''[2]

He hurriedly established his main line of resistance from the Somme to the northern end of the Maginot and ordered up troops from North Africa and the Italian frontier to bolster his forces. In all, he would have eight new divisions available by June 12. He was, however, woefully weak in men, tanks, and airplanes. About one-fourth of his infantry divisions had only two regiments. The 2nd Armored Division had only 86 tanks and the 3rd Armored had only 50. In all, France had fewer than 300 operational tanks left. All three light cavalry divisions

together could muster only 40 armored cars, and the French Air Force had only about 400 fighters and 70 bombers. The British forces still in France contributed another 180 tanks and about 40 airplanes to the defense.

At the local level, Weygand's plan called for the French forces to hedgehog in villages, woods, and other strongpoints. Each hedgehog was to have a 75-millimeter anti-tank gun. The problem was that France no longer had enough reserves to cover the gaps between the strongpoints; nevertheless, it was probably as good a plan as anyone could have designed, under the circumstances.

Like Hitler and Brauchitsch, Weygand also deployed three army groups:

- Besson's Army Group 3 deployed from the mouth of the Somme to Neufchatel-sur-Aisne. It included the newly formed 10th Army (Lieutenant General Marie-Robert Altmayer), and Frere's 7th and Touchon's 6th Armies.
- Huntziger's Army Group 4 included the 4th Army (General Edouard Requin) and the 2nd Army (now under Lieutenant General Henry Freydenberg) and extended from Neufchatel-sur-Aisne to a line east of the Meuse. The 4th Army had been withdrawn from the Maginot and inserted in the line east of Paris to cover the Champagne region. The 2nd Army covered the Meuse Valley.
- General Andre Pretelat's Army Group 2 defended the Maginot Line as far as the Swiss frontier. It consisted of General Charles Conde's 3rd Army (in the Metz district); General Victor Bourret's 5th Army (in the Strasbourg area); and General Auguste Laure's 8th Army, defending along the Upper Rhine and covering the Belfort Gap.

Weygand also created three *groupements de maneuvre* under Lieutenant General Robert Petiet, Lieutenant General Sylvestre Audet, and Major General Louis Buisson to handle German breakthroughs. Petiet and Audet were to deal with breakthroughs toward the Lower Seine, while Buisson was to launch counterattacks in the Champagne district, to protect the rear of the Maginot Line.

In beautiful summer weather, Hitler's legions redeployed from the Dunkirk sector with flawless precision. Kesselring recalled:

> Anyone who watched from the air and on the ground, as I did, von Kleist's and Guderian's panzers swing round from the northern maneuver towards the Channel and drive south and southeast to the Somme and the Aisne could not repress a surge of pride at the flexibility and skill of the German Army Command and the state of training of the troops.[3]

When one considers that less than 24 hours elapsed from the time the final shot was fired at Dunkirk until Army Group B launched the

next major offensive across the Somme, one cannot help but be amazed at the efficiency of the German General Staff in this, its finest campaign.

Meanwhile, on the French side, Generals Georges and Weygand were in complete agreement that the German bridgeheads over the Somme at Peronne, Amiens, and Abbeville had to be eliminated at once, before the Germans could resume their offensive. Georges considered the one at Abbeville to be especially dangerous, so he ordered General Rene Altmayer, the commander of the newly formed 10th Army, to destroy it at any price. On June 4, he attacked with the 2nd Armored Division, the 2nd Light Cavalry Division, the 15th Infantry Regiment, a British armored brigade, and three battalions of the British 51st Highland Division. The commander of the operation was Major General Sir Victor M. Fortune, the commanding officer of the 51st.

The attack began at 3:30 A.M., but began to miscarry immediately, because heavy fog forced the Allies to abandon their close artillery support plans. The German defenders were ready and resisted fiercely. Thirty-three French tanks were destroyed out of 73 engaged. The British armored brigade lost 60 out of the 120 tanks it committed, including 24 out of 30 heavy tanks. That afternoon, local German counterattacks retook several of the positions they lost earlier. The day before the Wehrmacht's great offensive was to begin, the Allies had lost more than 15 percent of their total tank strength in a needless and futile attack against well-prepared defensive positions.

The final phase of the French campaign began at 4 A.M. on June 5, when Fedor von Bock started his Somme offensive with an intensive aerial and artillery bombardment. The first main thrust took place in the south of Peronne, in Reichenau's zone, and was delivered by the IX Corps (four infantry divisions). French resistance was stiff, but by 9:30 A.M. Reichenau was able to commit elements of his armor: Hoepner's XVI Panzer Corps, which included 3rd Panzer Division (320 tanks), 4th Panzer Division (324 tanks), 2nd Motorized Division, and Hausser's SS-VT Motorized Division. By noon, the tank vanguards were up to six miles ahead of the infantry and had cut off the French frontline from its supplies and artillery support, as the gunners were now forced to protect themselves and could not carry out fire support missions for the infantry. ''The French position looked sound at first glance,'' one historian wrote, ''but it was deeply undermined by the ant-like activities of the panzers.''[4]

On the German western flank, Hoth's panzer corps attacked across the Somme between Hangest and Flixecourt. The 6th Rifle Regiment of Rommel's division seized a railroad bridge that the French had neglected to blow, and his engineers quickly unbolted the rails and threw them into the water. Soon Rothenburg's 25th Panzer Regiment was roaring across the bridge, followed by the rest of the 6th Rifle. By

noon, both of Hoth's panzer divisions were beyond Hangest. Here they ran into sharp French resistance, and the 7th Panzer became involved in a desperate battle for Hills 116 and 104 against French colonial troops. By 7:30 P.M., however, the division had broken through along a broad front south of Hornay, and French resistance west of Amiens was crumbling. ''All quiet forward, enemy in shreds,'' Rommel signaled at 9 P.M.[5]

On the other flank of Kluge's 4th Army, the men of Manstein's newly committed XXXVIII Corps attacked across the Somme before dawn in pneumatic boats. They met tough resistance but slowly pushed back the French Alsatian and North African defenders, and by nightfall they had gained enough ground to construct a bridge, over which they brought artillery and heavy equipment.

Meanwhile, along the Somme front, the French 2nd Armored Division faced a hopeless task. With its 67 light and six B tanks, it had to deal with six panzer divisions, at or near full strength, and was rapidly being crushed to death by the pure weight of the German attack.

At dawn on June 6, the German offensive resumed with undiminished violence. That day, Rommel gained nine miles on the French western flank, pushing back the French 31st Infantry and British 51st Highland Divisions. Elsewhere in the 4th Army's zone, the Germans experienced less success. A bitter struggle developed at Oisemont, in which both sides suffered heavy casualties and the French 2nd Light Cavalry Division was badly depleted, but the German advance was frustrated, and Stuelpnagel's II Corps, which was surprisingly poorly led, bogged down along the coast.[6] To the east, however, XVI Panzer Corps continued to gain ground against the French 7th Army. To check its advance, Frere ordered the French 1st Armored Division to counterattack, which it did, but with meager results. Down to one battalion of B tanks and one battalion of R-35 tanks and without air support, it was relentlessly pounded by the Stukas and then mauled by the panzers. By 11 A.M., it had lost half of its remaining strength. At the same time, Strauss's 9th Army forced back Touchon's 6th Army on the Ailette, just north of Soissons, northeast of Paris. That afternoon, Touchon decided to pull back to the Aisne during the night. Meanwhile, General Petiet's *groupement de maneuver* was committed against Hoepner's corps near Piox. It slowed the German advance but could not stop it and was unable to help the encircled strongpoints that the panzer troops had bypassed.

That evening, Weygand admitted defeat and ordered Army Group 3 to begin a general withdrawal along the entire front. The 10th Army retreated toward the Bresle, the 7th Army toward Davenescourt and Ribecourt, and the 6th Army toward the Aisne—and Paris. Since there were no reserves and the second line of resistance was unfortified, the disintegration of the French Army was predictable.

Bock's Army Group B broke out on June 7. South of Peronne, Hoepner's panzers caught the French 19th Infantry Division and destroyed it. On the French left, the 10th Army's line was broken at Piox and a 15-mile breach was ripped in its front. Hoth's corps broke into open territory, while the French rushed their 17th Infantry Division toward the gap in trucks. It was caught by the panzers before it could unload and deploy. Half of its infantry and almost all of its artillery was captured, and the division was smashed. By 11 P.M., Rommel's Ghost Division had covered 25 miles in a single day and was only 22 miles from Rouen. Walsporn was making equally rapid progress, and 10th Army was irrevocably split in two.

On June 8, the battle was developing so rapidly that von Bock abandoned his original plan (to turn Kluge's army east, join with Reichenau, and form a huge pocket north of Paris). Instead, he ordered Kluge to turn Hoth's divisions west, to destroy the isolated left wing of the 10th Army before it could escape south of the Seine or evacuate to the United Kingdom. This operation concluded on June 12, when the remnants of Lieutenant General Marcel Ihler's IX Corps surrendered to Major General Rommel at Saint Valery, on the coast. General Fortune and 10 other French and British generals were taken prisoner, along with 46,000 men, 8,000 of whom were British. Due to fog and the speed of the German armored advance, the Royal Navy only succeeded in evacuating 3,300 men. Rommel captured 58 tanks, 56 guns, 17 anti-aircraft guns, 22 anti-tank guns, 368 machine guns, 3,550 rifles, and 1,133 trucks. The next day (June 13), the German spearheads reached Le Havre, to the south. France's number-two port fell without a fight, although the Royal and French Navies had already evacuated some 11,000 men.

Elsewhere on June 8, Weygand converted the Headquarters of the Military Governor of Paris (General Pierre Hering) into the Army of Paris and ordered it to defend the Seine from Vernon to Pontoise. To the north, the German 6th and 9th Armies gained little ground as French resistance stiffened and the French 7th Army put up a surprisingly skillful defense. As a result, OKH decided that the 9th Army's bridgeheads over the Aisne east of Compiegne were the key to the situation. Brauchitsch and Halder, therefore, ordered Panzer Group Kleist to halt its attacks, withdraw from the battle, and reinsert itself in the Chateau-Thierry area, on the eastern side of the developing Paris salient. To exploit the success the infantry had achieved on the Aisne, the panzers were removed from the sector north of Paris and redeployed on the eastern end of Bock's army group. The move was carried out rapidly and with a great deal of skill—in fact, it was a logistical effort of the first magnitude, executed virtually without a flaw. The contribution of the German logisticians to the victories achieved during the

blitzkrieg era are not generally acknowledged, but without them there would have been a great many fewer victories. In any case, the gap created by the departure of Panzer Group Kleist was filled by Kuechler's l8th Army, which was taken from Army Group B's reserve.

Army Group A's offensive began at 3:30 A.M. on June 9. It had been scheduled to commence four days later than Army Group B's because its divisions that fought at Dunkirk had considerably further to travel to reach their new assembly areas. On June 9, Rundstedt's forces included the 2nd Army (Weichs), 12th Army (List), and 16th Army (Busch). Guderian's panzer group (four tank and two motorized divisions) was attached to 12th Army. These forces were opposed by the French 4th Army and the right wing of the 6th.

Following a two-hour air and artillery bombardment, the German infantry jumped off along a 100-mile front. By noon, the Aisne River and Canal had been penetrated in eight places by List's army alone and a number of bridgeheads had been formed, but all were too small to accommodate a panzer corps. When the impatient General Guderian learned that Lieutenant General Herbert Lock's 17th Infantry Division had gained a bridgehead more than a mile deep at Chateau-Porcien, a few miles west of Rethel, he called Major General Eberhard von Mackensen (the chief of staff of the 12th Army) and obtained permission to commit all of his armor to an advance through this single bridgehead. Guderian ordered the XXXIX Panzer Corps and 1st Panzer Division commanders, Schmidt and Kirchner, to send in the lst Panzer that very evening. This order was somewhat premature, because the defenders of this sector, the French 2nd Infantry Division, had established a defense in depth, and the panzers gained little ground the following morning. That afternoon, however, French resistance was finally overwhelmed, and the panzers broke into open terrain. The French only had enough troops to defend the strongpoints (mainly towns and woods), so Guderian's armored vehicles bypassed them and roared onto the Champagne Plain, which was devoid of natural obstacles—perfect tank country.

French resistance began to crumble. Reynaud begged Churchill to reinforce the defenses with the bulk of the Royal Air Force, but the British prime minister wisely refused to do so. He no longer believed that a French recovery was possible. That evening, as the remnants of the French 4th Army fell back toward the Marne, the French cabinet met at the Elysee Palace. This time there was no argument: all of the ministers favored abandoning the capital. The French government left for Tours almost immediately. In the haste and confusion, no one thought to inform General Hering, the Military Governor of Paris, of this act.

Meanwhile, Italy decided to join the war.

On May 26, Mussolini cornered two of his chief military subordinates, Marshal Pietro Badoglio (the chief of staff of the army) and Air Marshal Italo Balbo (the governor of Libya and commander-in-chief, North Africa) in the hall of the Palazzo Venezia in Rome. ''If Italy wanted to sit at the Peace Conference table when the world is to be apportioned, she must enter the war and enter it fast,'' he exclaimed.

Balbo tactfully asked Mussolini if he knew what he was doing. Badoglio sided with the aviation pioneer, pointing out that Italy was completely unprepared from a military point of view. Only 20 percent of its divisions were up to war strength and more than 70 percent of its armored divisions did not have a single tank. The army could not even provide shirts for all of its men, the merchant fleet was scattered all over the globe, and colonies were totally unprepared for war.

''History cannot be reckoned by the number of shirts,'' Mussolini interrupted.[7] He set June 5 as the date Italy would declare war on France and Great Britain.

Without bothering to coordinate its activities with the Wehrmacht, Italy declared war on France and Great Britain on June 10. Hitler made no attempt to disguise his contempt for Italian behavior and forbade Keitel to hold briefings or staff talks with the Italian Army. He felt that, since Italy had left Germany in the lurch just before its invasion of Poland, Germany was under no obligation to Rome now. This attitude was universally shared by Hitler's soldiers, who contemptuously referred to the Italians as ''harvest hands.'' However, the speed of the German victory had taken Mussolini by surprise; it would take his ''harvest hands'' 10 days to even reach the field.

General Weygand established his headquarters at Briare, six miles from his residence, the Chateau du Muguet, on June 11. That same day, word reached GHQ that the Germans had crossed the Seine west of Paris in several places. Weygand's second line of defenses had held less than 24 hours. East of Paris, the situation was also deteriorating. The XXXXIV Corps (on the right wing of Reichenau's army) had crossed the Marne at Ferte-sous-Jouarre and Chateau-Thierry and was followed by Hoepner's tanks, which crossed the river at Chateau-Thierry that same day and rejoined the battle. An encirclement of Paris was clearly taking shape. At the same time, other elements of Panzer Group Kleist were now advancing as rapidly as they could in the direction of Rheims, which fell later that day. Further east, Rundstedt was attacking all along the front of the French 4th Army and had taken the French 2nd Army in the left flank, while Guderian's divisions were advancing almost unopposed into the rear of Huntziger's Army Group 4, threatening to envelope the Maginot Line.

Weygand concluded that Paris could not be defended. That afternoon, he met with Reynaud and Petain and informed them of his

decision to declare Paris an open city. He had already issued orders that there was to be no resistance or demolitions. Neither Petain or Reynaud objected or agreed.

Events rapidly raced to their inevitable conclusion. Panzer Group Guderian roared south against little or no opposition. On June 13, Colonel Balck's 1st Rifle Regiment seized a bridge across the Rhine-Marne Canal near Etrepy. East of Paris, Panzer Group Kleist seized Saint-Dizier and Troyes against crumbling resistance. Weygand ordered the evacuation of the Maginot Line, but it came too late. Rundstedt's forces were advancing too rapidly and little could be salvaged. Many of the defenders of the Maginot were middle-age and had inadequate transportation. The French 8th Army had already been outflanked on the east, and the 3rd and 5th Armies were flanked on the north, northeast, and northwest. Another giant pocket was forming, but this time there would be no evacuation.

Meanwhile, the Army of Paris began to withdraw to the Loire. The capital of France was officially declared an open city on June 13. On the orders of Premier Reynaud, the Army of Paris and the 10th Army marched off in different directions. Hering's forces headed for Orleans, while the 10th Army (or what was left of it) marched for the Brittany. At the same time, the 2nd Panzer Division captured Vitry-le-Francois and Saint-Dizier, opening the road to Dijon for Guderian's tanks.

The French cabinet met that night at Chateau du Muguet and agreed to send a message to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, calling on Washington to declare war on Germany. Other than that, the concave consisted solely of empty debate and mutual recriminations between Reynaud and Weygand. The meeting was interrupted by a series of explosions: the Luftwaffe was bombing the Tours Airfield. The government then unanimously voted to move to Bordeaux and disappeared into the night.

From June 13 to 17, the Maginot Line was enveloped from behind by Panzer Group Guderian. Between Paris and the Meuse, Panzer Group Kleist crossed the Seine and took Troyes and Sens. On June 14, Leeb's Army Group C launched its offensive against Pretelat's Army Group 2, which now faced enemies both front and rear. Conde's 3rd Army, threatened with encirclement, hurriedly pulled back to Metz, in conjunction with Freydenburg's 2nd Army, which was also trying to hold out in the Verdun area against Reinhardt's XXXXI Panzer Corps. Bourret's 5th Army also pulled back, while Laure's 8th formed a pivot on the Vosges Mountains and the Belfort fortress, covering the withdrawals of the 3rd and the 5th Armies.

At 9 A.M. on June 14, German troops began to enter Paris. Major General Bogislav von Studnitz's Thuringian-Saxon 87th Infantry Division of Kuechler's 18th Army marched down the Champs-Elysees as a

stunned crowd looked on. Their silence was interrupted only by crying and an occasional sob.

The remaining British troops in France, commanded by Lieutenant General Sir Alan Brooke, headed for Cherbourg, the main evacuation port.

By now, the Germans had broken through everywhere and mass surrenders had begun. Three main German columns and a score of minor ones penetrated through the remnants of the French defenses. In the west, one major column headed down toward the mouth of the Loire. In the east, the main column was driving on for Lyons and the Rhone Valley; in the northeast, the main thrust was encircling Army Group 2. Concluding that they could not be stopped, Generals Georges, Besson (commander of Army Group 3), and Huntziger called for an armistice as quickly as possible. That same day, in Brest, Charles de Gaulle publicly accused Petain and Weygand of high treason and then boarded a British cruiser and sailed for England, along with General Lemoine (the commander of the French Chemical Corps) and 45 scientists. They carried France's supply of heavy water with them.

Mussolini also had a traumatic day. He met with German Ambassador Hans-Georg Viktor von Mackensen, who flatly rejected any idea of a joint Italian-German operation in France. If Italy attacked, he said, she would have to do so on her own. Even though he was horrified by this interview, Mussolini sent for Marshal Badoglio and ordered him to cross into France on June 18.

Meanwhile, at Pont-sur-Yonne, the dashing Lieutenant General Ritter Hermann von Speck, the acting commander of the XVIII Corps, was leading his troops from the front, as usual, when he was mortally wounded. He died a few hours later—the only German army general killed in the French campaign. He was succeeded by Lieutenant General Franz Boehme. Curiously, Speck was posthumously promoted to general of artillery on December 15, 1944, four and a half years after his death.[9]

The only Luftwaffe general to receive fatal wounds in the French campaign was Major General Wolf von Stutterheim, who had coordinated the dive-bomber attack for Guderian during the Battle of Sedan. Stutterheim had been wounded several times and earned the *Pour le Merite* in World War I, but he left the service in 1918 after suffering serious injuries in a horse fall. A forest master and glider instructor between the wars, he had crashed and broken both legs during the 1936 Olympiad. After Sedan, he was shot down by a French fighter, and the injuries he suffered during the ensuing crash landing caused an embolism, which killed him on December 3, 1940. He is buried in the Invaliden-Friedhof in Berlin.[10] Other senior German officers killed in action included Colonels Georg Friemel, commander of the 65th

Infantry Regiment (May 10); Oskar von dem Hagen, commander of the 376th Infantry Regiment (May 17); Guenter von Krebs, commander of the 483rd Infantry Regiment (June 5); Egon Fuchs, commander of the 104th Infantry Regiment (June 16); and Luftwaffe Colonels Guenther Schwartzkopf (May 14) and Otto Abernetty (died of wounds on July 2).

From a military point of view, the French campaign was already over on June 15, except for mopping up operations. Only a few isolated units offered serious resistance, and these were quickly swamped, bypassed, surrounded, or pounded into oblivion by the Luftwaffe. On June 16, the 1st Panzer Division captured the Saone River bridge at Quitteur intact. The XXXIX Panzer Corps reached Besancon-Avanne, where it captured 30 enemy tanks intact, while the XXXXI Corps (with the 20th Motorized Division leading) reached Bourbonne. Demoralized French troops surrendered by the thousands.

On the French right flank, the 6th and 7th Armies tried to regroup behind the Loire. To prevent them from doing so, the Luftwaffe bombed the bridges, troop concentrations, and refugee columns. German troops reached the outskirts of Orleans by 5:30 P.M.

The Reynaud government fell at 10 P.M. that evening. President Lebrun then asked Marshal Petain to form a government, which he did at 11 P.M. By that time, Pretelat's Army Group 2 was all but encircled.

At 1 A.M. on June 17, Marshal (now Prime Minister) Petain sent for Jose de Lequerica, the Spanish ambassador to France. Paul Baudouin, the new minister of foreign affairs, asked him to inform the German government through diplomatic channels that France wanted to know the conditions on which Hitler would conclude an armistice.

By now, refugees and civilian suffering was a major problem in unoccupied France. The town of Laval, for example, had a peacetime population of 28,000, but it had swollen to 80,000 due to evacuees. Throughout France, these displaced people were suffering from food shortages, dysentery, and bombing attacks from the Luftwaffe. An estimated 2,000 people, for example, were killed in one air raid against Rennes on June 17.

At 12:30 P.M., Petain broadcast a message to the nation, informing the French people that he was now in charge of the government and that he had requested an armistice. This news confused many French military units, who did not know whether or not to fire on German columns. Entire regiments stopped shooting that afternoon.

That night, Erwin Rommel's vanguards reached the outskirts of Cherbourg, and Lyon was declared an open city. There were now signs of disintegration almost everywhere. At Vienne, near Lyon, for example, French army engineers prepared to blow up a bridge, to slow the German advance. The town mayor got the women of the area to stand

on the bridge; the engineers, who did not want to kill the women, abandoned the bridge to the Germans. At Royan, the French civilians welcomed the Germans as saviors from the bands of violent, drunken French soldiers who were pillaging houses and churches, and even robbing refugees at gun point.

Meanwhile, the XXXIX Panzer Corps was given the green light to the French fortress of Belfort. It drove throughout the night of June 17–18, taking thousands of prisoners, including several heavy artillery units that did not fire a shot. At noon on June 18, elements of the 1st Panzer stormed Belfort and suffered only light casualties. Other elements of the 1st Panzer reached Giromagny, north of Belfort, and took 10,000 prisoners. The 29th Motorized drove through the Jura, adding to its bag of prisoners, while 40,000 men surrendered to Werner Kempf's 6th Panzer Division at Epinal. Other German units had similar experiences.

The forward elements of Erwin Rommel's 7th Panzer were pinned down outside of Cherbourg that morning by a French rearguard, while Port Admiral Le Bigot, the Military Governor of Cherbourg, smashed the harbor installations, despite the objections of the city's mayor. Rommel's advance (more than 150 miles in a single day) had been so rapid that he had outrun most of his division. Now he had to wait in frustration as the British completed their evacuation and Le Bigot finished his own program of destruction. By 2 P.M., much of the city was in flames. Rommel's tanks finally broke into the city late that afternoon and exchanged gunfire with the Royal Navy at about 4:30 P.M., but he was too late—the last British troopship had just pulled out when his vanguard arrived. Half an hour later, the future Desert Fox visited Admiral Le Bigot's office and formally accepted his surrender.[11] Farther to the south, Walsporn's 5th Panzer Division broke the thin line screening Brittany without difficulty. It captured Rennes, the staff of the 10th Army, and several generals, including Rene Altmayer. Only the French III Corps and the Cavalry Corps escaped; they withdrew to the Lower Loire and dug in on the left flank of the Army of Paris, which was also rapidly disintegrating. Farther east, Kleist encircled Moulins, took the industrial city of Le Creusot, and headed for Vichy and Roanne.

Later that day, Army Group 2 was completely encircled.

Lorient fell on June 19, but all French naval vessels that could not put to sea were scuttled. Germany would not capture a single undamaged French warship. Despite the political chaos in Bordeaux, no one wanted to hand the fleet over to the Germans—or to the British. The naval city of La Rochelle fell on June 22. As was the case at Lorient and Cherbourg, all oil reserves, ammunition dumps, workshops, docks, and other naval facilities were blown up. The mayor and other civilians protested against what they deemed to be senseless destruction, but the harbor demolitions continued just the same.

At 7 P.M. on June 19, Walsporn's 5th Panzer Division entered Brest. Brittany had been overrun by the Germans.

There were still examples of heroism and tenacious resistance by the French. At Saumur, for example, 2,200 cadets from the French Cavalry School successfully defended a 15-mile stretch of the Loire for two days; the panzers only broke through after the cadets ran out of ammunition. Elsewhere, however, the majority of the armed forces and the population only wanted to put an end to the fighting.

At 6:25 A.M. on June 19, the French government received a message from the German foreign ministry, asking for the names of the members of the French armistice delegation. Petain met with Weygand, Admiral of the Fleet Francois Darlan, and others, and decided that the delegation would be headed by General Huntziger. Mussolini, meanwhile, decided to take advantage of the delay that the armistice negotiations would cause by launching an immediate offensive in the Alps. Badoglio and Ciano condemned this act as tantamount to striking a man who was down, and indeed it did earn the Fascist dictator the contempt of most of the world, but it nevertheless went forward on June 20. The French met it with General Rene Olry's Army of the Alps, which had been reduced to three Series B divisions during the campaign. To the surprise and delight of many—including the vast majority of the German General Staff—Olry held off 32 Italian divisions for five days and inflicted severe casualties on Mussolini's attacking legions.

On the morning of June 21, the French armistice delegation arrived in Compiegne, the site of the signing of the 1918 armistice. They passed the French 1918 victory monument, which was now draped with a Nazi war flag. The statue of Marshal Foch, however, was in no way concealed. Inside the railroad car in which the 1918 armistice was signed, the French were met by Hitler, Hess, Admiral Raeder, von Ribbentrop, Goering, Keitel, and others. The negotiations began about 3:15 P.M., and the terms were fairly harsh. Northern France, including Paris, was to be occupied by the Wehrmacht until the end of the war (that is, until England gave up the fight). The terms, however, were in some respects less severe than those Germany had received in 1919—and were better than those the French had planned to impose after they defeated Nazi Germany. (According to their draft of the peace treaty, dated November 9, 1939, Paris had planned to impose reparations on Germany along the lines of those of 1919.) The negotiations bogged down, however, because the French delegates naturally wanted the best terms they could get. Huntziger was especially upset over the size of the occupied zone, which amounted to three-fifths of the country. So the war lasted another day.

June 21 was a day of major embarrassment for Benito Mussolini. His offensive in the Alps was all but shut down by an enemy he

outnumbered 10 to 1. All his divisions managed to do was surround the village of Abries, but even it was still holding out at nightfall.

Mussolini blamed the Italian people for the failure of his offensive. He told Ciano:

> What I lack is the right material. Even Michelangelo needed marble to carve his statues. Had he had only clay, he would have been a mere potter. A race that has been enslaved for sixteen centuries could not possibly become a race of conquerors within the space of a few years.[12]

Desperate, he requested that German paratroopers be dropped behind the French units holding the Alpine passes. OKW flatly refused to entertain the idea. He also proposed that an Italian force be airlifted to southern France, where it would join List's spearheads and attack the French Army of the Alps. The straight-laced General List, however, refused to even consider such a ''dishonorable'' idea. Finally, Mussolini asked the Germans to speed up their armored advance down the Rhone. This OKH agreed to do. General von Rundstedt, however, sabotaged even this plan. He hated the Duce. Once he had incurred Hitler's anger by asking him point blank why he wanted to ally with that ''Negroid asshole,'' Mussolini. Now Rundstedt issued a unique order to his panzer forces. ''Don't hurry too much,'' he said.[13]

Meanwhile, at 10:15 P.M. that evening, Huntziger spoke with Weygand on the telephone and disclosed the terms of the armistice. Weygand went to Petain, and described the terms as ''harsh, but not dishonoring.'' Weygand read out the text of the armistice (as telephoned by General Huntziger) to the French cabinet at 1 A.M. The ministers were generally relieved. Despite some tough provisions, the Germans had not demanded the surrender of the fleet, an autonomous and independent government was allowed, and enough armed forces were provided (100,000 men) to allow France to keep her empire.

Huntziger and his delegation met with the Germans again at 11:30 A.M. on June 22. Hitler was not present at this meeting; Colonel General Keitel spoke for the Germans. Huntziger expressed concern that the German armistice was tied to the Italian terms, which he did not know and which he feared might be excessive. The French general made an emotional appeal to Keitel, verbalizing his fear that the Franco-German armistice agreement might collapse if the Italians were greedy and averred that France would continue to fight if Italy's demands were inconsistent with her honor.

''At that moment,'' Keitel later told Jacques Benoist-Mechin, ''General Huntziger genuinely moved me. That was exactly what I should have said had I been in his position. I did not know how to answer him.''[14]

Keitel said all that he could say: that he could not give Huntziger an answer, because he did not know what the Italian terms would be.

We know now that Huntziger need not have worried. The Italian terms would not be excessive, because Adolf Hitler would not let them be excessive. Mussolini had wanted a considerable hunk of southern France (including Nice), as well as Tunisia. Hitler, however, would not allow such a huge reward for help that had arrived unwanted and at the last minute. The ''harvest hands'' had to settle for the territory they had actually captured, which was next to nothing.

The delegates met again at 6:42 P.M., after Huntziger received a communication from Petain, ordering him to sign the armistice. The surrender ceremony was concluded at 6:50 P.M. After the French delegation left, German engineers began the work of transferring the railroad car to Berlin, where it was placed on exhibit at the Lustgarten, to raise funds for the Winter Relief. It was destroyed during an Allied bombing raid in April 1944. The pedestal on which it had lain, as well as the stone and rails, were blown up, as were the French and Allied victory memorials. Hitler, however, ordered that the statue of Marshal Foch be spared, and it was the only one left undisturbed.

That afternoon in the Vosges Mountains, General Conde surrendered the 3rd, 5th, and 8th French Armies to General List, who accorded them all of the honors of war. Half a million men lay down their arms. That same day, the remnants of the French 10th Army also surrendered.

At 1:35 A.M. on June 25, 1940, the buglers sounded cease-fire, and the armistice took effect. Hitler celebrated the occasion with his staff, Albert Speer (his architect and personal friend), and two of his World War I comrades, Ernst Schmidt (now a master painter) and Max Amann, his former sergeant who was now the chief NSDAP printer.

For Germany, the losses in the French campaign had been relatively light. The Wehrmacht had suffered 156,492 casualties, including 27,074 killed, 111,034 wounded, and 18,384 captured or missing. The British had incurred 68,000 casualties, but their losses in weaponry and equipment was excessive. The Belgians and Dutch suffered 23,350 and 9,779 casualties, respectively (excluding prisoners). The French lost an estimated 123,600 men killed or missing and 200,000 wounded. The Germans also claimed the capture of 1.5 million prisoners—a figure that is probably close to the mark, in view of the mass surrenders in the last days of the campaign.[15] Total Allied casualties stood at approximately 90,000 killed, 200,000 wounded, and 1.9 million captured or missing.[16]

At 8 o'clock that morning, Hitler spoke to the German nation, which now almost worshipped him as the greatest hero in German history. He praised his Wehrmacht, and ordered that flags be displayed for 10 days and that church bells be rung for a week. Almost everyone in Germany was relieved. They thought that the war was over. The question that no one asked—that very few even thought to ask—was: ''What now?''

NOTES

1. Halder Diaries, May 25, 1940.
2. Benoist-Mechin, p. 171.
3. Kesselring, p. 60.
4. Benoist-Mechin, p. 243.
5. Rommel Papers, p. 50.
6. After this campaign, Stuelpnagel was returned to staff duties as chief of the Franco-German Armistice Commission.
7. Paul Carell, *Foxes of the Desert* (1960; reprint ed., 1972), p. 106 (hereafter cited as Carell, *Foxes*).
8. Irving, *Hitler's War*, p. 128.
9. Keilig, p. 327.
10. Taylor, *March*, p. 313.
11. Irving, *Hitler's War*, pp. 130–31.
12. Benoist-Mechin, p. 440.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 446.
15. Charles B. Macdonald, ''The Fall of the Low Countries and France,'' in *A Concise History of World War II* (1964), Vincent J. Esposito, ed., pp. 66–67.
16. Goralski, p. 123.

CHAPTER XXIII
THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

INDECISION, PROMOTIONS, AND PARTIAL DEMOBILIZATION

Adolf Hitler did not know what to do next in the summer of 1940. His troops rounded up the rest of the French Army, reached the Spanish border on June 27, and took the Channel Islands, the most notable of which were Guernsey (June 30) and Jersey (July 2), without opposition. However, the unofficial peace feeler he sent to Churchill via the papal nuncio in Switzerland in late June was rejected on the 28th, and Great Britain seemed to be preparing for a German invasion. General Sir Edmund Ironside, now the commander-in-chief of the Home Armies, was feverishly engaged in organizing, equipping, and training a new British Army. His task was monumental: he had 27 divisions, but there was only one fully equipped division in the entire kingdom, and it was Canadian. He faced extreme shortages in weapons, trucks, tanks, and equipment of every kind.

Not that Hitler wanted to invade. He did not. His overall strategic goals for Germany had not changed since he wrote *Mein Kampf*. He had never wanted a war of revenge against France and England, only Lebensraum in the East. The latter, however, had led to the former and now he wanted to invade the Soviet Union. First, however, the problem presented by the United Kingdom had to be dealt with.

For the army, duty in France was light. German soldiers bathed in the waters of the Channel, patronized the French restaurants, and wandered around Paris shooting—with their cameras. It was the era of good feelings between the French and their German occupiers. Of course, as of yet, the only occupiers they had met were combat troops, who were, by and large, well-mannered young lads who were away from home, often for the first time, and only wanted the war to end, so that they could return to their own country and to their friends, families, and loved ones. They were on their best behavior, intent only on

sightseeing, relaxing, and eating everything in sight, provided that it did not come from an army field kitchen. The French, Belgians, and others were, in fact, pleasantly surprised to find their German conquerors polite, correct, and not totally unlikable.

Naturally, there was plenty of maintenance work to do, especially in the motorized and panzer divisions, but, after the capitulation of France, the Wehrmacht solved its motor vehicle shortage problem. Thousands of captured French military vehicles were incorporated into the German Armed Forces, and the French automobile industry went to work, manufacturing trucks and other vehicles for the Reich. Germany temporarily solved its oil problems, for large stockpiles had been captured before the Allies could torch them.

In the meantime, acting on Hitler's orders, OKH began to demobilize divisions, as if the war was over. Hitler has been severely criticized for this action, and on the surface the criticism seems quite valid; however, when one analyzes the demobilization and considers the quality of the units involved in the context of Germany's overall strategic position in the spring and fall of 1940, a much different picture emerges.

In July and August 1940, 26 divisions were disbanded. Four of these (the 209th, 228th, 231st, and 311th) were infantry divisions from Wave 3. They were made up of men from the older age-groups, suitable for occupation and garrison duties, but hardly made ideal combat divisions. Only the East Prussians of the 209th had seen action at all. They fought in the Polish campaign, and had done well, but had remained in the East after that.

All of the troop units of the 9th and 10th Waves were disbanded and sent home. Nine of the disbanded divisions were made up of Landesschuetzen battalions. None of them saw combat and most of them never left Germany. The average soldier in these divisions was between 35 and 45 years of age and probably performed a greater service for the German war effort by working in a factory or in agriculture than in performing garrison duties in the Reich. Similarly, the Wave 10 divisions, which had been activated in June 1940, were made up of older personnel and were also disbanded.[1] Demobilizing these divisions hardly qualifies as a major military blunder.

The other four disbanded units (the 554th, 555th, 556th, and 557th Infantry) were *Stellungsdivisionen*—positional divisions. As part of Army Group C, they had been posted in fortified areas in quiet sectors opposite the Maginot Line. They had seen action in the French campaign, but it was relatively light; also, since they were almost totally immobile, Germany really had no need for them after the Battle of France.

Incidentally, not all of the divisional headquarters were broken up. Several were redesignated administrative area headquarters and were used to administer occupied territories in France, Poland, and elsewhere.

Table 23.1
Panzer Divisions Created in the Winter of 1940–41

Panzer Div (Wkr)	Cadre Unit	Panzer Regiment	Motorized Infantry Regiments
11th (VIII)	11th Motorized Bde.	15	110, 111
12th (II)	2nd Motorized Div.	29	5, 25
13th (XI)	13th Motorized Div.	4	66, 93
14th (IV)	4th Infantry Div.	36	103, 108
15th (VII)	33rd Infantry Div.	8	104, 115
16th (VI)	16th Infantry Div.	2	64, 79
17th (VII)	27th Infantry Div.	39	40, 63
18th (IV)	4th and 14th Inf. Divs.	18	52, 101
19th (XI)	19th Infantry Div.	27	73, 74
20th (IX)	19th Infantry Div.	21	59, 112

While 26 divisions were disbanded, 18 reserve infantry divisions on active duty were returned to reserve status. These included nine Wave 3 divisions, five Wave 5 divisions, and four Wave 6 divisions.[2] These, of course, could be called back to active service if the need arose.

Along with his demobilization of the Landeswehr, positional, and reserve divisions, Hitler simultaneously doubled the number of panzer divisions in the army. This was achieved by reducing the number of panzer regiments in an armored division from two to one and reducing the number of battalions in a panzer regiment from three to two. (A few panzer regiments, however, were allowed to keep their III Battalion.) This process gave the panzer branch and the Home Army a surplus of tank regiments. They became cadre units, which grew into panzer divisions in the winter of 1940–41. The new tank divisions are shown in Table 23.1.

The wisdom of this controversial decision to double the number of tank divisions in the German Army but without significantly increasing the number of tanks has been debated ever since. Guderian, Ritter von Thoma, and Baron Hasso von Manteuffel all opposed the decision, but General Walter Nehring, one of the earliest proponents of armored warfare and one of the most successful tank commanders in World War II, was in favor of the move—both at the time and after the war. Nehring believed that the old divisions, which sometimes had a strength of 280 or more tanks, were too cumbersome for one man to command effectively. The Fuehrer, of course, was considering invading the Soviet Union at that time and felt that he needed more tank divisions, even if they were weaker than those that fought in France, which

was one-twentieth the size of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Many of the senior German officers also felt that the proportion of motorized infantry and motorized artillery in the tank divisions needed to be increased, and subsequent American and British experiences indicate that they were right.[3] On the other hand, six of the panzer divisions (the 6th, 7th, 8th, 12th, 19th, and 20th) were equipped with Czech vehicles and were inferior to the others.

At the same time the panzer divisions were split, a similar process was taking place in the motorized infantry branch. The 3rd, 10th, 14th, 18th, 25th, 36th, and 60th Infantry Divisions were stripped of their third regiment and motorized. The 16th Infantry Division was split: half of it was used to form the 16th Motorized Division and half used as the cadre for the new 16th Panzer Division. At the same time, the 2nd Motorized Division was transferred to the tank branch, reinforced with the 29th Panzer Regiment, and redesignated the 12th Panzer Division, while the 13th Motorized Division added the 4th Panzer Regiment and became the 13th Panzer Division. The new motorized divisions joined the previously existing 20th and 29th Motorized Divisions to give the German Army a total of 10 motorized divisions by the spring of 1941, and the Waffen-SS had three more. Very few of the army's motorized battalions, however, were mechanized—they traveled by truck, rather than by armored personnel carrier.

Meanwhile, OKH expanded its *Sturmartillerie* (assault gun) capacity at a steady pace. This branch had originally been envisioned in 1935 by Manstein, who sent a memo to General Beck, stating that technical studies indicated that the infantry needed an armored, self-propelled gun under infantry control, to provide the non-panzer units with direct fire support when required. He recommended that each infantry division be given an organic assault gun battalion of three batteries (six guns per battery). Beck thought that this was a good idea, as did Fritsch, who approved of the project.

The task of designing the weapons system fell to Colonel Walter Model, the chief of the technical section of the General Staff. To save time and money, it was decided to mount a 75-millemeter gun on a PzKw III chassis. Despite the fact that this gun had a limited traverse, it proved to be an excellent weapon, and a political tug of war developed within OKH as to who was going to man and control the new assault gun battalions. Much to the disgust of General Guderian, the assault gun mission was given to the artillery; nevertheless, it must be concluded that this was an excellent decision, as was demonstrated by events. By the beginning of 1944, the assault gunners had knocked out more than 20,000 enemy tanks on the Eastern Front alone.

The assault gun proved its worth in France, where the standard infantry anti-tank weapon, the 37-millimeter gun, proved ineffective

against the heavy French and British tanks. After Paris capitulated, the Artillery School at Jueterbog began to produce two assault gun battalions every three months, but this was soon accelerated to three battalions every two months. Each battalion had a strength of 31 guns. Brauchitsch and Halder eventually intended for each infantry division to have its own assault gun battalion, but this goal was far from realized by the spring of 1941.

Even before the German partial demobilization plan was put into effect, Hitler's hopes for a negotiated peace with Great Britain began to fade. On July 2, he issued a directive in which he stated that an invasion of England was possible, ''providing that (1) air superiority can be attained.''[4] The following day, Hitler was given abundant proof that Great Britain intended to fight to the death. Fearing that the Vichy government might hand its fleet over to the Germans, they attacked and sank the principle French warships at Kels-el-Kebir, the French naval base at Oran, Algeria; 1,297 French sailors were killed in the process.

Despite the destruction of the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir, Hitler continued to vacillate over what to do next; meanwhile, the British did what they could to prepare to repulse a German invasion. As a last resort, Churchill even ordered plans made to spray the German bridgeheads with mustard gas, in direct violation of the Geneva Convention. Throughout Britain, soldiers and civilians worked day and night, building pillboxes, strongpoints, and roadblocks. Road signs were removed to confuse the German invaders, mines were laid on invasion beaches, barbed wire obstacles were constructed, and old cars dotted fields that might be potential landing sites for German gliders. Coastwatches signed up by the dozen, and thousands of British civilians joined the Home Guard, and served as militia or as military auxiliaries, and even drilled with brooms, because they had neither rifles nor uniforms. Much of what the Home Guard did was not militarily sound (the positions they constructed, for example, did not always face the right direction), but overall they were a valuable asset in preparing the country for invasion.

So, too, was the United States. The days of America as the arsenal of democracy were just beginning, and Washington stretched the neutrality laws to their limit in support of the British. President Roosevelt transferred surplus arms and ammunition to Britain as rapidly as he could, including half a million rifles, 500 artillery pieces, 500 mortars, 35,000 machine guns (all with ammunition), and tons of other essential military equipment and vehicles. The United States started a massive naval construction program, inducted its National Guard units into federal service (in September 1940), and expanded its standing army at a major rate.

Hitler, meanwhile, still had no strategy. On July 16, however, he finally issued a top-secret directive to the military leaders, in which he

wrote: ''Since England, despite her hopeless military situation, still shows no sign of willingness to come to terms, I have decided to prepare, and if necessary to carry out, a landing operation against her.'' If necessary, he added, he would occupy the entire country.[5] The key words in this dispatch, of course, where ''if necessary.'' Nevertheless, all three branches of the service began serious planning for Operation Sea Lion: the invasion of England.

Hitler was in no hurry to invade, however. On July 18 and 19, the former Austrian vagrant staged a national celebration for the victors of the French campaign. On the 18th, the Berliner 218th Infantry Division marched through the Brandenburger Tor. The following evening, Hitler spoke to the nation at the Kroll Opera House. As was usual on such occasions, he called for peace. He then proceeded to the business at hand. For himself, he claimed full credit for originating the Manstein Plan and guiding the military operations; then he passed out field marshal's batons, lesser promotions, and Knight's Crosses on an unprecedented scale. During World War I, the Kaiser only appointed five marshals from the Officers' Corps. Hitler passed out 12 on July 19 alone. Nine of the new marshals were army generals. In order of seniority, they were as follows: von Brauchitsch, Keitel, von Rundstedt, von Bock, von Leeb, List, von Kluge, von Witzleben, and von Reichenau. Three Luftwaffe generals also received their batons: Milch, Sperrle, and Kesselring. The highest honor went to Goering, who was named *Reichsmarschall des Grossdeutschen Reiches* and was awarded the Grand Cross of the Iron Cross. He was the only one to receive this decoration in World War II.

There were 19 promotions to the rank of *Generaloberst* (colonel general). Fourteen were army officers. In order of seniority, they were as follows: Halder, Dollmann, von Kleist, von Weichs, von Kuechler, von Schobert, Busch, Guderian, Hoth, Strauss, Haase, von Falkenhorst, Hoepner, and Fromm. Five Luftwaffe commanders were also promoted to colonel general: Stumpff, Keller, Weise, Grauert, and Udet, and Rolf Carls was promoted to *Generaladmiral*. Two army officers of junior rank were singled out for distinction: Eduard Dietl, whom Hitler called ''the Lion of Narvik,'' and Alfred Jodl. Dietl was promoted to general of mountain troops and decorated with the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross—the highest decoration for personal courage that Nazi Germany had at that time. For assisting the Fuehrer's ''genius'' in Norway, Jodl was jump promoted from major general to general of artillery, bypassing the rank of lieutenant general altogether.

Five Luftwaffe officers were also promoted to *Generale* rank: Geissler, von Greim, Loerzer, von Richthofen, and Jeschonnek. Like Jodl, von Richthofen and Jeschonnek were jump promoted. Kurt Student, who was still incapacitated, had been promoted to general of fliers on May 22. Several lower-ranking officers were also promoted.

The massive promotions of July 19 accomplished a number of things. First of all, they rewarded the generals for their victory over France. Second, they devalued the rank of field marshal and thus elevated Hitler's own status by comparison. Certainly the rank of field marshal did not command the awe in World War II that it did earlier in German history, simply because there were so many of them. ''They're cheaper by the dozen,'' one sarcastic observer commented.[6] In fact, Hitler had 25 field marshals from 1936 to 1945—several more than Napoleon. ''In 1940,'' Telford Taylor wrote,

> By shrewd tactics ... Hitler converted the generals' stunning victories to his own uses, and thus perpetuated his own domination of the officer corps. He made them pay dearly for their batons and stars and medals. The price was a powerless anonymity, and it is chiefly remarkable that so few of the generals sensed the cost.[7]

Certainly the massive promotions and decorations contributed to muting the senior officers' opposition to the Fuehrer and his plans. Few would deliberately offend this fountain of promotion, decoration, and (later) even of wealth, for Hitler soon began the practice of handing out six-figured awards that might be described as ''bonus checks'' to selected generals.

After the awards ceremony ended, the generals retired to their headquarters, to celebrate with their staffs. Hermann Goering adjourned to his Berlin residence, the Leipziger Palace, where he threw a dinner party. Thomas von Kantzow, Goering's stepson by his first wife, Karin, recalled:

> Hermann had brought back pate de foie gras from Paris, and as we ate it we drank numerous toasts, each one in a different colored vodka from Poland. Then we had roast salmon from Danzig which we accompanied with a Moselle from a cellar Hermann had acquired in Trier, a goose from his estate at Veldenstein with Chateau Haut Brion, and then very light tiny Viennese torte with Chateau d'Yquem.

After dinner, the men were served Napoleon brandy, while the women (clothed in the latest Paris fashions and wearing expensive Parisian perfume) consumed various French liqueurs. ''Everyone got quite tipsy,'' Kantzow recalled.[8] The fat Reichsmarschall soon busied himself with designing and modeling his new uniforms and decorations. He forgot all about the war.

The promotions and celebrations did not end on July 19. By August 1, 73 officers held the rank of general or above in the army alone. Only Adolf Hitler stood above rank. And that is exactly where he wanted to be.

OPERATION SEA LION

If Hitler was successful in subjugating the Officers' Corps on July 19, his ''peace speech'' failed to subdue the British, who continued with their feverish preparations while their diplomats played for time and stalled when confronted with German peace feelers. Certainly, the British refused to accept Nazi domination of Europe as a *fait accompli*—a fact that became clear to Hitler as July neared its end. On July 31, therefore, the Fuehrer set the tentative date for the invasion of the United Kingdom as September 15.

While Hitler vacillated and Goering partied, the General Staff of the Army, OKW, and the Naval Operations Staff (SKL) were hard at work, planning Operation Sea Lion. After a long debate, a compromise plan was reached. It called for an initial assault landing by 40,000 men over a two-hour period along a 60- to 70-mile front, from Brighton to Folkstone in southern England. At the same time, the 7th Air Division would drop or air land about 10,000 paratroopers and gliderborne soldiers in the Hythe area. Then second waves would be landed. By the end of the first day, 125,000 men were to storm ashore, to be reinforced in subsequent days to a strength of 25 to 40 divisions. Later, at the insistence of SKL, the army reduced its minimum requirements for Sea Lion to 13 divisions (260,000 men), of which 100,000 were to land on the first day. The rest were to be ashore by the end of the third day. The ground operations would be directed primarily by the 9th and 16th Armies. Elaborate deception plans were also made, as were feint sea and air landings. Detailed preparations were made for the occupation and administration of the United Kingdom, including lists of those to be hauled off to concentration camps. To please Hitler, Brauchitsch even made plans to transport every reasonably fit British male from ages 17 to 45 to Germany—as slave laborers. Even the signs to be nailed to property requisitioned by the Wehrmacht were printed. The SS was also making plans for the occupation of the United Kingdom. Its occupation forces would be subordinate to Heydrich's RHSA, the Reich Main Security Office, which since 1939 controlled the Gestapo, the Criminal Police, the Security Police (SIPO), and the SD. Heydrich planned to employ six *Einsatzgruppen* in Britain, once it had been conquered. Meanwhile, the navy assembled an astonishing collection of transports, warships, barges, tugs, trawlers, and small vessels of every description for the landings. By September, 1.7 million tons of shipping, including almost 2,000 barges and ferries (mostly French), and more than 400 tugboats had been assembled for the invasion.

The OKH remained optimistic about the prospects of the invasion, and the German people were sure of success. Raeder and the SKL were considerably more doubtful. The first prerequisite for success, however,

was air superiority over the Strait of Dover and southeastern England. And this, of course, was the provenience of the Luftwaffe.

THE DEFECTIVE AIR FORCE

As we have seen, the High Command of the Luftwaffe was both fractious and fragmented. Udet, the chief of the Technical and Air Armaments Office, was a man absolutely unqualified by either training or temperament for his post. In 1940, under Udet's inept leadership, Germany lost both its technological edge in aircraft design and its ability to outproduce the British. When Germany invaded Poland, the Luftwaffe had about 4,000 aircraft. Production between then and the summer of 1940 was only about 650 aircraft per month, enough to cover Germany's losses, but very little over that.

By July 1940, Germany had about 4,500 combat airplanes, as opposed to 2,900 for the Royal Air Force. Monthly British aircraft production, under the inspired leadership of Lord Beaverbrook, the recently appointed Minister of Aircraft Production, now far exceeded German monthly production—a fact that presaged ill for the Luftwaffe. In July, for example, the British turned out 1,665 airplanes, of which almost 500 were fighters. In addition, most of the German planes were obsolete by 1940 standards. The He-111 bomber was underpowered, lacked defensive armament, and could carry a bomb load of only 1.5 tons.

The Me-109 fighter was as good as any British fighter except perhaps the Spitfire, and even it lacked range. It could only stay airborne for 80 minutes, and it took 30 minutes to take off and reach combat altitude over Britain and another 30 minutes to return to base in France. This meant that the Me-109 could remain airborne over Britain for just 20 minutes. During the Battle of Britain, many of them would remain in combat too long and crash land or ditch into the sea, simply because they ran out of fuel. Other German airplanes also suffered from deficiencies in their ranges.

The Luftwaffe had sought to make up for the lack of range in the Me-109 by producing the Me-110, a twin-engine fighter whose range was almost twice that of the Me-109. Unfortunately, it was poorly designed, clumsy to fly, lacked acceleration, and was 20 mph slower than the Spitfire. It was an easy victim for the better British fighters.

The main fighter opponents that the Luftwaffe faced in the Battle of Britain were the Hurricanes, Spitfires, and Defiants. The latter was a heavily armored two-seater airplane that had four machine guns in the rear, but it was highly vulnerable due to its low speed, its slow rate of climb, and the fact that it had no forward-firing armament. It also lacked maneuverability and was as ineffective in daylight operations as the Me-110 or Ju-87 Stuka. Soon it was relegated to nighttime use only

and played an insignificant part in the Battle of Britain. During the battle, the Royal Air Force had some 11 Defiant squadrons, 30 squadrons of Hurricanes, and 20 equipped with Spitfires. The Hurricanes were considerably slower than the Me-109 (325 mph verses 357 mph) because it was heavily armored, a characteristic that also made it less maneuverable than the German fighter. Its only real advantage over the Me-109 was that it could remain airborne longer. For these reasons, the British developed the tactic of attacking the German fighter escorts with Spitfires, while the Hurricanes went after the bombers; as a result, the Hurricane shot down more aircraft than any other fighter on either side during the Battle of Britain.[9]

The Spitfire is considered by many to be the best conventional defensive fighter to emerge from World War II. It was faster than the Me-109 (370 versus 357 mph) and was somewhat more maneuverable. It was also a more friendly aircraft, as far as the pilot was concerned. The Me-109 was tricky to fly. It was extremely sensitive, unforgiving, had a tendency to veer to the left on takeoffs, and could veer either direction on landing. The designers sacrificed a certain amount of structural strength to give it the ability to make steep, sudden dives. The Me-109 could drop 3,100 feet per minute, as opposed to about 2,500 feet for the Spitfire. This ability, plus its ceiling (36,000 feet—about 2,000 feet more than the maximum altitude the Spitfire could reach) gave the Me-109 the ability to dive behind an opponent and make a kill or to escape a tight situation. The lack of structural strength, however, cost several Luftwaffe pilots their lives, including the leading Luftwaffe ace in the Battle of France, Wilhelm Baltasar, a chivalrous gentleman and a gifted fighter pilot. He was killed in an aerial duel with Spitfires over France. An investigation revealed that not one British bullet touched his airplane. His wing had collapsed during a turn, due to the structural weakness of his airplane. And Baltasar was not the only one to suffer such a fate. Major Joachim Muencheberg, the commander of the 77th Fighter Wing (JG 77) was killed in Tunisia in March 1943, when his wing buckled. He had 135 kills at the time (102 against British and American opponents) and did not make the novice's mistake of overstressing his aircraft. Despite its shortcomings, however, the Me-109 was certainly the best German fighter during the first four years of World War II and arguably the best it ever had.

Despite its weaknesses, the Luftwaffe did have a major advantage in August 1940: a numerical lead in operational airplanes. There were, however, other combat factors that had to be considered. First, Britain had the advantage of an organized defensive system. True, they had only about one-fourth of the anti-aircraft guns that they needed, but they partially made up for this deficiency by using searchlights, tethered barrage balloons (to discourage low-level attacks on places of

importance, such as airplane factories) and—most important—a radar chain. Radar, then in its infancy, was one of the keys to the British defense in the Battle of Britain. It provided early warning of Luftwaffe air raids and allowed Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh C. T. Dowding, the chief of the Royal Air Force Fighter Command, to concentrate his squadrons against major Luftwaffe attacks. It also gave the British pilots the opportunity to rest. Because they knew when and to where a German raid was coming, they were spared the need to fly constant patrols. This was a major advantage for the Royal Air Force, especially at key points in the battle, when pilot exhaustion became a very real factor in the air war.

Strangely enough, the Germans did not appreciate the value of the British radar chain, even though they knew of its existence and had some radar prototypes and other pioneer electronic devices of their own. Had they fully grasped the significance of the British radar chain, the German pilots could have knocked it out easily enough—and dealt Fighter Command a devastating blow in the process. This omission may partially be explained by the fact that the Luftwaffe leadership was overly optimistic about their chances of winning the battle. General Jeschonnek, the air chief of staff, for example, declared to Rear Admiral Wilhelm Moessel, the naval liaison officer to OKL, that the navy would not be needed to defeat the United Kingdom. ''The Luftwaffe [alone] will conquer England in a matter of months!'' he said.[10] This attitude was shared by many other senior Luftwaffe officers, who, after all, had only known victory—up until this point.

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

In July 1940, the Luftwaffe deployed three air fleets: Kesselring's 2nd (in the Low Countries and northeastern France); Sperrle's 3rd (in France, south of Le Havre); and Stumpff's 5th (in Norway and Denmark). They had a combined strength of 3,350 airplanes, of which about 75 percent were serviceable. They had 813 Me-109s, 282 Me-110s, 406 Stuka dive-bombers, and 1,232 bombers—He-llls, Do-17s, and Ju-88s. Of these, 875 bombers, 316 Stukas, 227 Me-110s, and 702 Me-109s were operational on August 13. Table 23.2 shows the Luftwaffe's Order of Battle on August 13, and Figure 23.1 shows its dispositions in August 1940.

The great German-British air battle of 1940 can be divided into three distinct phases: (1) the Battle of the Channel; (2) the onslaught designed to overwhelm the Royal Air Force and to give the Luftwaffe command of the air space over southeastern England (that is, over the invasion beaches); and (3) the terror bombing raids against London and other cities.

Table 23.2
Luftwaffe Order of Battle, Eagle Day, August 13, 1940

5th Air Fleet (Stumpff)
- X Air Corps (Geisler)
  - KG 26 (He–111s)
  - KG 38 (Ju–88s)
  - I/ZG 76 (Me–110s)

2nd Air Fleet (Kesselring)
- I Air Corps (Grauert)
  - KG 1 (He–111s)
  - KG 76 (Do–17s and Ju–88s)
  - KG 77 (Ju–88s)
- II Air Corps (Loerzer)
  - KG 2 (Do–17s)
  - KG 3 (Do–17s)
  - KG 53 (He–111s)
  - II/StG 1 (Ju–87s)
  - IV/LG 1 (Ju–87s)
  - Gruppe 210 (Me–109s and Me–110s)
- IX Air Corps (Coeler)
  - KG 4 (He–111s and Ju–88s)
  - I/KG 40 (Ju–88s and FW–200s)
  - KG 100 (He–111 ''Pathfinders'')
- 1st Night Fighter Division (Kammhumber)
  - NJG 1 (Me–110s)
- 2nd Fighter Command (Doering)
  - JG 3 (Me–109s)
  - JG 26 (Me–109s)
  - JG 51 (Me–109s)
  - JG 52 (Me–109s)
  - JG 54 (Me–109s)
  - ZG 26 (Me–110s)
  - ZG 76 (Me–110s)

3rd Air Fleet (Sperrle)
- VIII Air Corps (Richthofen)
  - StG 1 (Ju–87s)
  - StG 2 (Ju–87s)
  - StG 77 (Ju–87s)
  - JG 27 (Me–109s)
- V Air Corps (Greim)
  - KG 51 (Ju–88s)
  - KG 54 (Ju–88s)
  - KG 55 (He–111s)
- IV Air Corps (Pflugbeil)
  - LG 1 (Ju–88s)
  - KG 27 (He–111s)
  - StG 3 (Ju–87s)

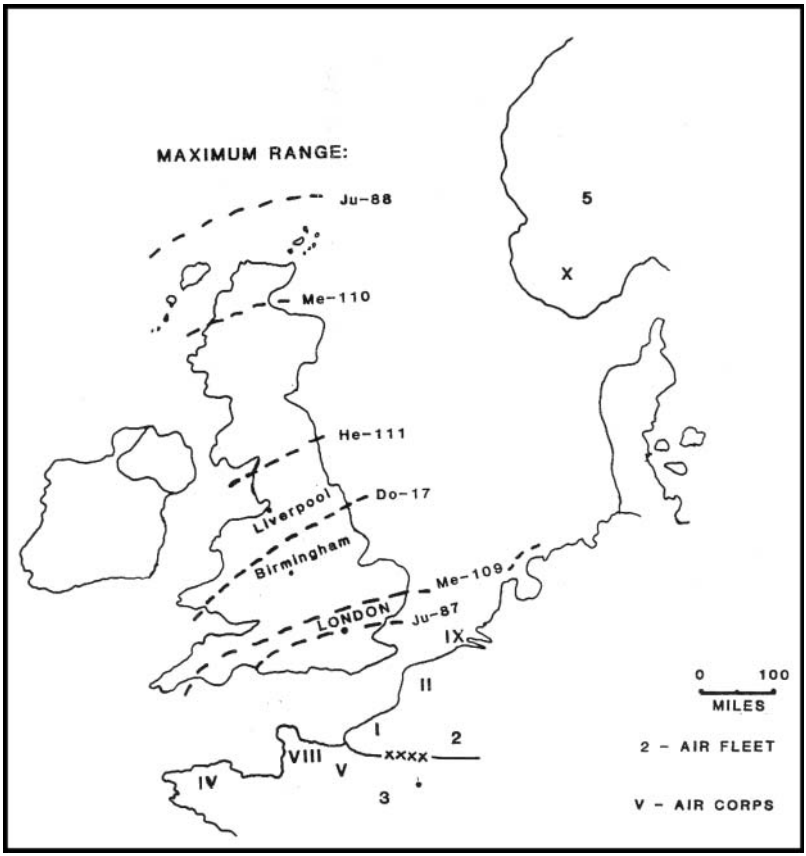
Table 23.2 (*continued*)

3rd Fighter Command (Junck)
JG 2 (Me–109s)
JG 53 (Me–109s)
ZG 2 (Me–110s)

Source:
Cajus Bekker, *The Luftwaffe War Diaries* (1969), p. 545.

Phase 1 of the Battle of Britain dealt with German efforts to neutralize British merchant shipping in the English Channel. Goering assigned this mission to only two corps: Loerzer's II and Richthofen's VIII. The task of closing the 21-mile-wide Straits of Dover (and thus shutting

Figure 23.1
Great Britain, August 1940



London off from the Atlantic convoys) was given to Colonel Johannes Fink of Loerzer's corps.

The first clash came on the afternoon of July 10, when an air battle developed over a stretch of water outside Dover that became known as ''Hellfire Corner.'' Over the next 10 days, the Royal Air Force lost 50 fighters. The Germans lost 92 airplanes, but many of them were Stukas, which were slow and vulnerable when recovering from dives. Only 28 of the lost German aircraft were the valuable Me-109 fighters.

Fink soon developed the tactic of sending in the Stukas first, to attack the British convoys. They would soon be counterattacked by the Spitfires and Hurricanes, but this was what Fink was waiting for. He and his Me-109s, several thousand feet above the battle, would swoop down on the British fighters. The Germans soon learned to distinguish the Defiant from the Hurricane (which it resembled) and discovered that the Defiant had no forward-firing machine guns. When the German aces made this distinction, the usefulness of the Defiant was at an end. On July 19, for example, six out of a flight of nine Defiants were shot down. The British, however, were experiencing similar success rates against the Stuka. Meanwhile, Loerzer and Richthofen tried to use the same tactics with the twin-engine Me-110 fighter as Fink used with his single-engine 109s, but all experiments with the 110 were disastrous failures. It was simply too unwieldy to have much of a chance against the modern British fighters.

At the end of July, Luftwaffe intelligence estimates of British air losses convinced Hermann Goering that the Royal Air Force was already crippled and that he had won the first phase of the Battle of Britain. It should be noted here that Luftwaffe intelligence estimates, like those of the Abwehr, were usually wrong. They reflected the personality of Colonel Joseph ''Beppo'' Schmid, a former Freikorps member and an old-guard Nazi who had taken part in the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923. Speaking to his interrogators in 1945, General Adolf Galland said that ''Beppo Schmid was a complete wash-out as an intelligence officer, the most important job of all.''[11] Field Marshal Milch agreed, adding that Schmid ''was a man who trimmed his sails to the wind for fear of Goering. Besides which he wasn't an airman and didn't understand the significance of the reports he received.''[12] During his long tenure as intelligence chief (January 1, 1938, to November 9, 1942), Schmid did nothing to upgrade the low quality of the intelligence service. Galland wrote later that, before 1944,

> [T]he most sophisticated piece of technical equipment that the intelligence branch used was a pair of binoculars. The personnel consisted of some old reservists of the intelligence battalions, pensioned policemen, unfit men, or overaged civil servants from the local authorities, and a horde of female assistants.[13]

Beppo Schmid nevertheless enjoyed the protection of his friend Hermann Goering throughout the war and ended up as commander-in-chief of Luftwaffe Command West (formerly 3rd Air Fleet) (November 1944 to April 28, 1945).

In late July 1940, Schmid's erroneous reports led Goering to conclude that the Royal Air Force was so badly depleted by its losses in the Battle of the Channel that the time had come for an all-out assault on the British air defenses. In fact, British industry had produced 496 fighters in July (four times their average monthly production before Dunkirk) and Fighter Command was actually stronger at the end of the month than at the beginning.

Hitler approved Goering's plan to go after Fighter Command, but added the restriction that, under no circumstances was he to conduct terror raids—not even in retaliation for British attacks on German cities. This went against the strategic line advocated by Field Marshal Kesselring, who wanted the air effort concentrated against one target: London. ''By the time we have killed a few thousand Cockneys, the British will be screaming for peace,'' he declared at a conference at Karinhall in the first week of August.[15] Sperrle stoutly opposed this idea, stating that it would be playing into the hands of the Royal Air Force. Guenther Korten, his chief of staff, echoed his sentiments by pointing out that, to attack London, the bombers would have to fly beyond the range of their Me-109 fighter escorts. This was not quite true: London was within the maximum range of the German fighters, but just barely. In any case, the Fuehrer Order settled the issue—for the moment.

THE DECISIVE BATTLES AND A FATEFUL MISTAKE

Goering set *Alder Tag* (Eagle Day), the start of what became known as the Battle of Britain, for August 10, but weather forced him to postpone it until August 13. His plan called for the German bombers to attack British airfields, radar sites, the Royal Air Force ground organization, aircraft factories, and other targets. Simultaneously, they would serve as bait for the Hurricanes and Spitfires, which would then be destroyed by the escorting Me-109s and Me-110s. Both Sperrle and Kesselring opposed these tactics; they wanted to destroy the Royal Air Force ground organization (including airfields, radar stations, supply depots, and so on) via nighttime bombing, but they were overruled by the Reichsmarschall. Because of the lateness of the season, September 15 had been set as the last possible day to launch Operation Sea Lion, and it was absolutely essential for the Luftwaffe to have aerial superiority over southeastern England by then. Goering's orders, however,

placed the Me-109 pilots at a severe disadvantage, because they would now have to fly zigzag patterns to keep pace with the slower bombers—thus using up precious fuel and further reducing their already limited range. In addition, since they were tied to their bombers, the German pilots could not dictate the timing of fighter battles, nor take advantage of the sun. The Royal Air Force also enjoyed a number of other advantages. Operating over their own territory, British pilots who bailed out were quickly returned to their own units; German airmen were promptly captured and spent the rest of the war in a prisoner-of-war camp.

Eagle Day went badly for the Germans. Because of poor weather, Kesselring had to cancel 3rd Air Fleet's morning sorties, allowing Fighter Command to concentrate on Speerle's air fleet. In all, the Luftwaffe flew 1,485 sorties, against 727 by Fighter Command. They lost 45 airplanes (nine of which were Me-109s). The Royal Air Force lost only 13 airplanes. As was typical throughout the air war, both sides claimed to have shot down dozens more airplanes than the enemy lost. (Such claims, incidentally, were not always propaganda lies; it is easy to understand how an excited and often frightened pilot might overestimate the damage he inflicted on an opponent in a fast-moving air battle, during which time he probably had only two or three seconds to observe his enemy.)

For the Luftwaffe, the next few days were as dismal as Eagle Day had been. On August 14, it lost 19 airplanes, against the Royal Air Force's eight. The following day, Stumpff's 5th Air Fleet tried to launch a surprise attack across the North Sea against the British airfields and aircraft factories in northeast England. They were unaware that the British ULTRA codebreakers had cracked their code and completely ignored the possibility that radar might pick up the raiders.

Stumpff attacked in two columns—both of which were located by radar operators an hour before they neared the British coast. One column of 65 He-111s, escorted by Me-110s, was scattered almost immediately and was not able to reach its targets. The second column (Ju-88s, escorted by Me-110s) managed to bomb an airfield and blew up an ammunition dump near Bridlington, but the losses that day were excessive: 16 Heinkels and six Ju-88s, or 20 percent of Stumpff's entire bomber force. Seven Me-110s were also shot down. Not a single Royal Air Force fighter was lost in the air. This was the end of 5th Air Fleet, as far as daylight operations were concerned. The German Air Force did better in southern England, where two aircraft factories were struck and some Royal Air Force fields were damaged, but overall August 15 was unquestionably a victory for the Royal Air Force. Seventy-five German planes were lost, as opposed to 34 for the British. Both sides were shaken by their casualties, but the battle continued.

On the 16th, the Luftwaffe lost 45 airplanes, while the British lost 21 in the air. Bad weather caused the cancellation of all operations on the 17th, but on August 18, Fighter Command shot down 71 German aircraft, while losing only 27 itself. Schmid's intelligence branch now estimated that the Royal Air Force had only 160 fighters left; he missed the mark by 590 airplanes. Goering, however, was still dissatisfied with the Luftwaffe's performance. On August 19, he met with his commanders at Cape Blanc-Nez. He pulled his Stukas out of the battle, but insisted that the twin-engine Me-110s remain in action; in fact, he ordered that Me-109 units be detached to fly escort for them. The Battle of Britain, therefore, witnessed the absurd spectacle of fighters flying escort missions for other fighters. The Reichsmarschall also gave the junior leaders a severe dressing down and showed them the harsh side of his personality for the first time. He also changed his tactics. From now on, he declared, the German pilots were to concentrate exclusively against enemy air forces in southeast England, including their airplanes, airfields, oil depots, and sector stations (the nerve centers of command and control for the Royal Air Force).

The Cape Blanc-Nez conference almost won the Battle of Britain for Adolf Hitler. When the weather finally cleared on August 24, the Luftwaffe flew with a single idea in mind: destroy the Royal Air Force, especially Fighter Command. They nearly did. In retrospect, we know that August 24 to September 6 was the critical period in the Battle of Britain. Both sides had suffered heavily, but, during this period, the battered British aircraft factories were unable to make good on the Fighter Command losses, and Air Chief Marshal Dowding had to funnel his reserves into the battle. Almost every day, Sperrle and Kesselring subjected England to 1,000 plane raids, and the airfields around London were pounded. On August 24, the airfield at Manston (near Ramsgate) was smashed, its runways covered with bomb craters, almost every building was completely destroyed, and its communications facilities utterly disrupted. So great was the damage that a nearby town had to be permanently abandoned. Not far away, the fighter bases and vital sector stations at North Weald and Hornchurch suffered a similar fate. Several British planes returned to base, only to pile up or crash, because there were no safe landing surfaces left. At the same time, German tactics were modified to reduce the British radar advantage. German formations flew up and down the coast of France, within range of British radar, which had no way of predicting when one of them would suddenly whip west and launch a raid on England. As a result, the Royal Air Force pilots now had to fly defensive patrols for the first time in the battle, further adding to their stress and exhaustion.

On August 25, the airfield and communications center at Warmwell was severely damaged, and Debden and Southampton airfields were

crippled the next day. The airfields at Rochford and Eastchurch were visited and mauled on August 27, and the big airfield at Biggin Hill was pounded twice on August 29. On the 31st, the Luftwaffe made its biggest effort to date, when 1,450 daylight sorties were flown against the Fighter Command bases at Biggin Hill, Debden, Hornchurch, Croydon, and Eastchurch. For the Royal Air Force, it was the worst day of the battle so far. For the first time, British air losses exceeded German losses (41 to 39). Some of the Royal Air Force airfields resembled moonscapes; hangars, buildings, control towers, and sector stations were ruins, aircraft were destroyed on the ground, and more than 4,400 tons of bombs had fallen on Fighter Command's bases and communications centers. Goering's pilots continued to attack relentlessly. Biggin Hill was blasted again on September 1, Lympne and Hornchurch were pulverized on the 2nd, North Weald and West Malling were the victims of September 3, Lympne and Hornchurch were revisited on the 4th, and Biggin Hill was attacked once more on September 5. During the same period, the bases at Kenley, Northolt, and Manston were subjected to repeated attacks. By September 6, Biggin Hill was operating at one-third capacity, and several other Royal Air Force bases were incapable of operating at all. The sector stations had been smashed, and the air defense of southeastern England was nearly paralyzed. Goering had predicted that Fighter Command would fight for its bases, and he had been proven right: during the period August 24 to September 6, the Royal Air Force lost 273 fighters against 308 Luftwaffe aircraft (most of which were bombers). In the decisive category of fighter aircraft, the Luftwaffe lost 146 Me-109s, but the Royal Air Force lost 208 Spitfires and Hurricanes. Casualties now exceeded production, as British factories could no longer cover the Fighter Command's losses, despite the efforts of Lord Beaverbrook and his workers. The Royal Air Force's frontline fighter strength remained more or less constant at 650 airplanes, but the number in reserve declined from 518 in the first week of June to 292 on September 7.[16]

For the first time, the Royal Air Force was also experiencing an acute shortage of trained fighter pilots. It had lost about 300 fighter pilots in France and Flanders, and there had been a continual drain since. In the week of August 24 to September 1, it had lost 231 fighter pilots killed, wounded, and missing: more than 20 percent of its total in a single week. By the first week of September, the average squadron in Fighter Command had only 16 pilots out of a normal complement of 26. Those who were left had to fly three or four missions a day, placing a physical and mental strain on the pilots that no one could endure indefinitely. Their junior leaders, so essential to a successful air battle, were also falling at an appalling rate. In July and August alone, 24 percent of the Fighter Command's squadron leaders and 40 percent of its

flight commanders had been killed or seriously wounded.[17] Gloom settled over Fighter Command, while there was jubilation in the capital of the Reich, where neutral media correspondents reported that German officers were predicting that Operation Sea Lion would be launched within days. Fighter Command was, in fact, nearing its breaking point. Air Chief Marshal Dowding faced two choices, and one was as bad as the other. He could continue the battle until Fighter Command was totally wiped out due to attrition, or he could withdraw north of London, out of the range of the Me-109. If he took this latter step, however, Hitler would have control of the air space above the vital beaches of southeast England and could commence his invasion. Either way meant the end of the United Kingdom. Unknown to the British, Hitler had, on September 3, set the tentative date for invasion as September 21, although he reserved the final decision until September 10–11. ''What we need now,'' Dowding said, ''is a miracle.''[18]

That miracle came on August 24–25, when a pair of Ju-88s lost contact with their leaders and accidentally jettisoned their bombs over London as they headed for home. Two of the bombs fell in the heart of the city, destroying the ancient church of St. Giles in Cripplegate and ripping a nearby statue of John Milton off its pedestal. Several civilians, coming out of nearby pubs or on their way home from the movies, were killed.

Even at the time, there was little doubt that the bombing was unintentional. Churchill, however, immediately ordered a series of reprisal raids on Berlin, in an attempt to goad Hitler into committing a rash act: to change the focus of the air war from the bases of Fighter Command to terror raids on London and other cities. The Royal Air Force Bomber Command launched the first raid on the Berlin suburb of Ruhleben on the night of August 25–26. Three more minor raids were conducted against Berlin in the next 11 days, and other targets were also attacked. They did little material damage, but they infuriated the Fuehrer; in fact, they succeeded in just the manner Churchill hoped that they would. On the night of September 4–5, Hitler addressed an audience at the Sportspalast in Berlin, and his wounded pride caused him to lose his temper. ''When they declare that they will attack our cities in great strength, then we will *raze* theirs to the ground!'' he roared. He ordered massive retaliatory daylight bombing raids on London, thus diverting the Luftwaffe from its real objective—air superiority over the invasion beaches—just when it was on the point of achieving a decisive victory.

Hermann Goering, for one, saw that terror bombing for the sake of retribution was a mistake. When he asked Jeschonnek why he was in favor of it, the chief of the Air General Staff replied that it would force England to sue for peace. The Reichsmarschall then asked whether

Jeschonnek thought that the people of Germany would surrender if Berlin were blasted into rubble. No, the general replied, but British morale was made of more fragile stuff than German morale. ''That,'' the Fat One replied, ''is where you are wrong.''[19] Kesselring, optimistic as usual, sided with his former subordinate, Jeschonnek; Sperrle cried that it was a foolish mistake to take the pressure off of the Royal Air Force now, just when it was on the point of breaking. Hitler's decision, however, took the matter out of his hands.

The Battle of Britain entered its next phase on September 7. The principle target was shifted to London, and Beppo Schmid assured the air fleet commanders that daylight bombing would force the remnants of the Fighter Command to engage them over the city, where Dowding's squadrons would at last be destroyed. This time, he estimated the Royal Air Force's fighter strength at 350. It was actually 650, with almost 300 in reserve.

On the afternoon of September 7, the Luftwaffe struck London with 400 bombers, escorted by 600 fighters. The Royal Air Force only attacked the fringes of the bomber columns. By the end of the night (bombs fell until 4 A.M. on September 8), 660 tons of bombs had fallen on London and the area around the Thames was described as ''a sea of flames.''[20] Streets were blocked with debris and entire blocks were burned to the ground. Docks were consumed by fire and unknown numbers of civilians were blown to atoms by HEs, roasted to death, or buried alive in the rubble of what had once been their homes. The anti-aircraft defensive was weak, and some of the most famous places in London were hit, including Downing Street, Trafalgar Square, and Buckingham Palace. Most of the damage, however, occurred in the poor and overcrowded districts of London's East End. By daybreak, some 400 civilians were dead.

The massive, around-the-clock raids continued for seven days. Another 2,000 Londoners perished under the bombs and more than 10,000 were wounded, and the area of operations was expanded to include Southampton, Brighton, Portland, Eastbourne, Canterbury, Norwich, and other cities. Tens of thousands were left homeless. Meanwhile, with the pressure off, Fighter Command recovered. Its airfields were quickly made operational again, the output of its factories began to exceed losses again, and it rapidly rebuilt its strength. Goering, meanwhile, oscillated between optimism and doubt. On September 15, he subjected London to yet another massive raid, despite the heavy losses the Luftwaffe was experiencing. Many Me-109s were being lost because they did not have enough fuel to maneuver in a dogfight; some crashed into the sea, while others bellied in on the French beaches, their fuel tanks empty.

Sunday, September 15, is known in the Royal Air Force annals as Battle of Britain Day. It was sunny at mid-morning, when 400 bombers and 700 fighters swept toward London. This time, however, Fighter Command had recovered to the point at which it could strike more than just the periphery of the German formations. Almost as soon as they hit the coast, the Germans were under attack from 300 fighters, and the number of British squadrons in combat increased as the flights continued inland. The Luftwaffe lost 56 airplanes, as opposed to 26 for Fighter Command. The losses were nevertheless devastating. At least 20 more Me-109s had been forced to ditch in the English Channel (all in the 10-mile stretch between Le Touquet and Boulogne) because they ran out of fuel.

This was one of the turning points of the battle. Hitler was now convinced that the Luftwaffe had definitely not established air superiority over the invasion beaches. On September 17, he postponed Sea Lion indefinitely. Britain, he decided, would have to be subjugated by other means. Although the bombing was not over, and they were not yet sure of the fact, the Royal Air Force had won the Battle of Britain.

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THE RISE OF THE WEHRMACHT

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The German Armed Forces and World War II

Volume 2

Samuel W. Mitcham Jr.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE WINTER OF FRUSTRATION, 1940–41

THE AIR WAR

Hitler's order to cancel Operation Sea Lion did not end the air war over Great Britain; in fact, he had little choice but to continue it. During the period September 7–15, 1940, British fighters had shot down 321 German warplanes (as opposed to British losses of 174 airplanes). By October 20, in a period of less than seven weeks, the Luftwaffe bomber wings had lost 30 to 35 percent of their strength and the fighter squadrons had lost 20 to 25 percent. General Moelders called it a ''Verdun of the air.''[1] For the first time, Luftwaffe morale began to deteriorate.

After commenting that ''the fighters have let us down,'' Hermann Goering lost interest in the war once more.[2] He withdrew to the luxurious Ritz Hotel in Paris, where his signal officer caught him telling his wife on the telephone that he was at that very moment on the cliffs of Calais, watching his squadrons crossing the English Channel for Britain.

The raids on London continued, however. In the 57 days between September 7 and November 3, an average of 200 bombers per night attacked London.[3] Losses were heavy—55 airplanes on September 27 alone, and the Luftwaffe was not receiving enough replacement aircraft. In fact, in 1940 alone, aircraft factories in Great Britain outproduced those in Germany by 9,924 to 8,070 airplanes. On September 30, the Luftwaffe nevertheless launched another daylight raid over London and lost another 47 airplanes, as opposed to only 20 for Fighter Command. This brought German Air Force losses since June to 1,650—more than the Luftwaffe could afford. Accordingly, Goering finally changed tactics. The around-the-clock raids were to be abandoned, he ordered;

daylight bombing had proven too costly. Henceforth, the Luftwaffe was to attack only at night.

For a time, these tactics were quite effective. Night aerial warfare was in its infancy and the British, as of yet, had no effective countermeasures for nighttime bombers. Hitler continued this nighttime blitz against Britain, because he had publicly committed himself to heavy bombing raids; besides, they were damaging the economic infrastructure of the United Kingdom, and the raids were a safe way to continue the war without significant loss to the Luftwaffe. London was hit frequently, as were Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol, Glasgow, and other cities.

One of the most highly publicized raids occurred on the night of November 14, 1940, when Coventry was demolished. Coventry was a medieval city that boasted a beautiful fourteenth-century cathedral; it was perhaps even more famous for the legendary ride of Lady Godiva in the eleventh century; however, it was made mostly of wooden buildings and was burned almost totally to the ground when 437 He-111s dropped 450 tons of HE and incendiary bombs on it. More than 50,000 buildings were destroyed (including the cathedral), and 380 people were killed. One hundred and sixty-five of these people were so badly burned that identification was impossible and they had to be buried in a common grave.

Since the raid, the myth has grown that Coventry was not a military target, and Hitler devastated it solely for the purpose of striking a blow at British morale; furthermore, the story goes, Churchill and his government knew about the raid three days in advance, because his electronic warfare experts had cracked the German code. If he had evacuated the city, or so the tale continues, the Germans would have known that their code was broken, so Churchill deliberately withheld the news of the upcoming raid from the civil defense authorities, for the greater good of the war effort. None of this is true. First of all, Coventry *was* a military target; in fact, it housed one of the largest concentrations of armaments factories in Great Britain. Second, Churchill did not receive advanced warning; in fact, he expected a raid on London that night.

Fighter Command flew 165 sorties that night, but, since their planes were still not equipped with radar, they only managed to engage seven bombers and did not shoot down any of them. The only bomber Goering lost that night was a victim of ground fire.

The air campaign against Britain did not end with a bang; it merely petered out. The Luftwaffe flew 3,884 sorties in December 1940. The number gradually declined to 2,465 in January 1941, and to only 1,400 in February.[4] Meanwhile, the British began to receive huge amounts of aid from the United States, where President Franklin Roosevelt

adopted a policy of ''all aid short of war.'' On September 2, 1940, the Anglo-Americans signed an agreement by which London got 50 World War I destroyers (for use against the Wolf Packs), in exchange for 99-year leases on Great Exuma Island in the Bahamas, and on bases in Jamaica, Antigua, St. Lucia, Trinidad, and British Guiana. The British also turned over bases in Bermuda and Newfoundland—which freed more British forces for employment against Germany. The 50 destroyers—most of which had been in mothballs in the Philadelphia Naval Yard—were refitted and steamed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where the Royal Navy took them over.

On November 5, 1940, Roosevelt was reelected for an unprecedented third term, but it was the closest election of his presidential career. Even so, in early December, he proposed what was soon introduced in Congress as the Lend-Lease Bill. It called for the United States to loan the United Kingdom $7 billion worth of American military equipment by June 30, 1942. According to the bill, London would have to return the guns, ships, and other equipment after the war. The Lend-Lease Act was passed by the U.S. Congress on March 11. It, in effect, placed half of the tremendous American economy and manufacturing might at the disposal of the British. A month later, the Americans quietly took control of Greenland (a Danish-owned island) and expelled the German detachments manning weather stations there.

Clearly the Americans, led by their president, were drifting closer and closer to war with the Third Reich.

THE NAVAL WAR

Even before the Luftwaffe became fully engaged in its life-and-struggle with the Royal Air Force, Admiral Karl Doenitz's U-boats returned to the Battle of the Atlantic. This time, they were equipped with torpedoes that worked and were in a much better geographic position. In June and July 1940, the Wehrmacht occupied the French ports on the Channel and the Bay of Biscay, giving the submarines forward bases that were much closer to the vital British shipping lanes. The convoys were now more vulnerable, because of the Royal Navy's losses in the Norwegian campaign and the evacuation of Dunkirk, coupled with the fact that the British had to keep strong naval forces in the home islands, in case Hitler did launch the threatened invasion. In addition, the French fleet was no longer available to assist in escort duties. As a result, many ships had to sail without a destroyer escort, and quite a few sailed alone. Also, few British aircraft were available to fly cover for merchant shipping.

June 1940 was the beginning of the first ''Happy Time'' in the history of the German submarine branch. They now had the use of French harbors and repair facilities, which were later protected by huge,

concrete submarine ''pins.'' These ports significantly reduced the U-boats' turnaround time to the shipping lanes and greatly increased the amount of time the submarine could remain in the battle zone. In June, U-boat aces sank 64 ships, totaling 260,500 tons—their highest total in any month to date. Only eight of these ships were sunk in convoy; all of the rest were unescorted vessels. Nazi Germany also had a new list of war heroes. Lieutenant Englebert Endrass in *U-46* sank six ships, and Lieutenant Hans Jenisch in *U-32* sank five, bringing his personal total to 10 ships and one destroyer. The big hero, however, was once again Guenther Prien, who sank 10 ships on one patrol.

July was another good month for the U-boats—they sank 267,000 tons of Allied and neutral shipping. This figure fell to 214,000 tons in August, but the British losses were still devastating. The effectiveness of the U-boats was enhanced by the Focke-Wulf 200, which began operating in July and August. The Condor, as it was called, was a four-engine transport developed by Lufthansa solely for long-range commercial fights. It was adapted to military purposes by the 40th Bomber Wing, operating out of Bordeaux-Merignac, and it was used as a long-range reconnaissance bomber. It still had all of the characteristics of a civilian airplane, however, and could easily be defeated by any known Allied fighter, provided that fighter could engage the Condor. The FW-200, however, had a range of 2,206 miles and operated at such distances from shore that it simply could not be reached by British fighters in 1940. It sank a number of Allied merchantmen itself (a modified, C-model Condor could carry 2.3 tons of bombs) and, by September 1940, had accounted for 90,000 tons of Allied shipping. Its main value, however, lay in its ability to locate Allied convoys and to relay that information to Admiral Doenitz. For this reason, Churchill called it ''the scourge of the Atlantic.'' It would take the Allies years to completely solve the problem presented by the Condor, but they fought back by providing the convoys with CAMs (Catapult-Armed Merchantmen), which could launch fighter aircraft against the Condors. CAM-launched fighters had a major disadvantage, however; they could not be recovered and had to ditch into the ocean—an act that often had fatal consequences for the pilot.[5]

By now, Doenitz was working on his Wolf Pack tactics. The focus of the Battle of the Atlantic now shifted to the area the British called the Western Approaches: the route around Northern Ireland, through the North Channel, and across the Irish Sea to Britain's west-coast ports, Liverpool and Glasgow. Doenitz, therefore, deployed his U-boats in the waters of the Western Approaches north of the British Isles. When a convoy was spotted, a message was immediately dispatched to Doenitz's headquarters at Kerneval, near Lorrient. Doenitz would then order all available U-boats to converge on the convoy. The first victim

was SC 2, a convoy of 51 merchant ships. It was escorted part of the way by the Canadian Navy, and the Royal Navy was to escort it on its last leg; in the middle, however, it was on its own. Doenitz ordered four U-boats to intercept it. The head of this reception committee was Guenther Prien, who attacked the convoy at 11:30 P.M. on September 7 and was soon joined by Guenter Kuhnke in *U-28*. Between them, they sank five ships, and SC 2 was only saved from horrendous losses by the abysmal weather.

The next convoy, HX 72, was not so fortunate. On the night of September 21–22, a Wolf Pack attacked the 37 ship convoy and sank 14 of them. Lieutenant Joachim Schepke in *U-100* accounted for eight vessels, and Otto Krestschmer in *U-99* sank three. And so it went. By the end of September, the U-boat captains had sunk 59 ships, totaling 295,000 tons—a tremendous total, especially when one considers that Doenitz rarely had more than 30 operational submarines at any one time. The Wolf Pack's tactics had been proven effective, and undersea warfare had been revolutionized.

October was another disastrous month for the Allied convoys. On the 9th, Convoy SC 6 was attacked by two U-boats (*U-103* and *U-123*), and lost three ships. In the next six days, three more convoys lost 10 more ships. Then, for four horrifying days, SC 7 (35 ships) was brought under attack by Heinrich Bleichrodt's *U-48*, Georg Wilhelm Schulz's *U-124*, Heinrich Liebe's *U-38*, Karl-Heinz Mohle's *U-123*, Endrass's *U-46*, Fritz Frauenheim's *U-101*, Kretschmer's *U-99*, and Schepke's *U-100*. The German submariners scattered the convoy and sank 27 ships in all—a total of 105,000 tons. On board the downed ships were 200 tanks (enough to equip an entire armored division), 670 guns, 120 armored cars, 250 Bren carriers, 26,000 tons of ammunition, 3,000 rifles, 10,000 tons of rations, several tons of food, 2,100 tons of tank supplies and repair parts, and tens of thousands of gallons of gasoline.[6] The German propaganda ministry jubilantly dubbed this battle ''The Night of the Long Knives.'' Total Allied losses to submarines for the month of October stood at 78 ships (60 lost in convoys, 15 unescorted vessels sunk, and three sunk by Italian submarines). Only the advent of winter weather (the winter of 1940–41 was one of the worst on record in the North Atlantic) brought the first ''Happy Time'' of the U-boats to an end.

By the end of 1940, only 22 German U-boats had been sunk. The number of operational U-boats, however, had dropped to 22, less than the total available at the beginning of the war. But, at last, the U-boat construction program—long delayed by Hermann Goering—was more than catching up with the losses, and the future looked grim for the United Kingdom. In 1940, almost 4 million tons of Allied and neutral shipping (1,059 ships) had been sunk—2,186,158 tons of it by U-boats.[7] Great Britain was slowly strangling under the effects of Hitler's

blockade. Her imports had fallen drastically, as had her per capita calorie consumption. When 1941 began, it was by no means certain that Britain would be able to survive another year, even if Hitler did not invade the island.

THE GREAT DECISION

Hardly a month before his armies completed the conquest of France, Hitler made perhaps the greatest and most fateful decision of his career. He decided to invade the Soviet Union. As early as June 2, during a visit to Army Group A's headquarters in Charleville, he informed some of his officers (General of Infantry Georg von Sodenstern among them) that, after the anticipated peace with Great Britain, he would at last ''be able to concentrate on [his] major and real task: the conflict with Bolshevism.''[8]

Hitler had always looked on Russia as part of Germany's natural Lebensraum and had never been comfortable with the Soviet alliance, which was so dear to the heart of his foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop. Hitler was quite upset by the aggressive tendencies Stalin exhibited when he was busy in the West. In 1939, the Reds invaded Finland and made territorial demands on Turkey. On June 15, the after day Hitler's divisions entered Paris, the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania. Shortly thereafter, Stalin annexed Latvia and Estonia as well.

Hitler and von Ribbentrop were completely taken aback by Stalin's actions in the Baltic area. It is true that, under the terms of the Moscow Pact, Estonia, Latvia, and most of Lithuania were in the Soviet sphere of interest, but, to the Germans, ''sphere of interest'' meant just that. They had no idea that Stalin intended to use the pact to annex the Baltic States—even the Mariampul area of southern Lithuania, which, according to the pact, was in the German sphere of interest.

The loss of the Baltic States was certainly economically damaging to the Third Reich, but Stalin was by no means through. On June 23, the day after the French signed the armistice at Compiegne, Molotov summoned Count Werner von der Schulenburg, the German ambassador, and told him that the Bessarabian question must be settled at once. Moscow, he said, was determined to use force if Romania did not peacefully accept Stalin's dictates. In addition, Molotov said, the Soviets were demanding that the Romanians hand over Bucovina, and he expected Berlin to support the Soviet claims. Bessarabia had belonged to Imperial Russia until the end of World War I, but the Soviets had absolutely no claim to Bucovina, nor was it in the Soviet sphere of influence as spelled out in the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement of 1939.

The Soviet demand caused a great deal of alarm in Berlin, especially at OKW, because the German armed forces could not function without

Romanian oil. The Reich also imported large amounts of food and fodder from that country; however, the Wehrmacht was still too involved in the West to interfere with Stalin's aggression. The Romanians received the Soviet ultimatum on June 26, and it gave Bucharest less than 24 hours to cede Bessarabia and northern Bucovina or face the threat of Soviet invasion. Ribbentrop hastily sent instructions to his ambassador in Bucharest, telling him to advise the Romanians to accept the ultimatum. Obediently, Romania agreed the next day, and the Red Army marched into the territories the day after that. Berlin was relieved, because it would have lost almost all of its oil had the Soviets been given an excuse to seize all of Romania; nevertheless, the entire incident pointed out how vulnerable the economy of Nazi Germany was to Soviet aggression and how dangerous it was to have Joseph Stalin as a neighbor. In fact, since September 1939, the Soviet Union had annexed more than 286,000 square miles—an area containing 20 million people.

The Soviet annexation of Bessarabia and northern Bucovina, coupled with its annexation of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, spurred Hitler to a decision. He told Jodl that he intended to invade Russia that fall, and on July 21, he instructed Brauchitsch to plan an autumn invasion of Soviet Russia. The army commander-in-chief was now completely cowed by the domineering Fuehrer, but, for once, the normally wooden-headed Field Marshal Keitel opposed Adolf Hitler's plans and sent him a detailed written memorandum, enumerating the reasons why this plan was impossible to execute.[9] The bulk of the armed forces were in the West and the transportation difficulties would be insurmountable, even if it were not too late in the season to begin a campaign in Russia, which it was. On this occasion, Hitler listened to military reason and moved the date of the invasion back to the spring of 1941.

Was the plan to invade the Soviet Union in 1941 meant to be a preventive stroke, or was it an act of aggression? Actually, it was both. In view of the Soviet actions and attitudes since August 1939, Hitler was convinced that Stalin would not keep to the letter of any agreement any longer than it was in his interest to do so. Russia's entire policy in 1940 had been aimed at Soviet domination of southeastern and northeastern Europe. ''Hitler was not prepared to accept the risk of conducting [a] war in which he was dependent on the goodwill of Stalin, whose ambitions he assessed rather more realistically than either Churchill or Roosevelt,'' Wolfgang Koch wrote.[10]

On July 29, Hitler told his staff generals that Britain's only remaining hopes were the United States and the Soviet Union. If Russia were destroyed, the United States would also be effectively eliminated from the European geopolitical calculations, because it would be too busy

with Japan in the Pacific. If Russia were overwhelmed, Britain's last chance would be gone. Germany would then be the master of Europe and the Balkans.[11]

Foerster pointed out that, between 1935 and 1940, Hitler and his generals refused to recognize one of the lessons of the 1914–18 war: that a Continental War could not remain limited to Europe. In the summer of 1940, according to Foerster, Hitler recognized the basic facts of Germany's position more fully than his strategic advisers. He understood that Germany was not capable of winning a worldwide war. To him, the conquest of Russia was looked on as a panacea for both the strategic dilemma facing the Reich and for Germany's inferior capabilities for sustaining a war of attrition.[12] Despite his later claims that he opposed the entire venture, Halder enthusiastically went to work on the detailed planning for the invasion. In fact, he had preceded the dictator. Quite independently, Halder had begun to plan a preventive military blow against the Soviet Union in mid-June, and, by July 3, the General Staff was already engaged in a detailed study of the ''Eastern Question,'' almost four weeks before the Fuehrer gave them the go-ahead.[13]

Hitler, at this time, was pursuing a multifaceted policy of waging a delusitory war against England while simultaneously maintaining peace in the Balkans and preparing to invade the Soviet Union. Grand Admiral Raeder, meanwhile, was looking for another way to attack Great Britain, now that the idea of a direct assault (Operation Sea Lion) had been ruled out. He felt strongly that the United Kingdom should be defeated before the invasion of the Soviet Union took place. On September 26, he met with the Fuehrer and tried to divert his attention to the Mediterranean, where the Italians had become the main focus of the British offensive war effort. Rome did not yet realize this, Raeder said, which is why it turned down German offers of military aid; however, he added, it was of vital importance that Germany clear up the situation in the Mediterranean during the winter (that is, before the invasion of the Soviet Union).

Hitler asked how the grand admiral thought the situation in the Mediterranean could be settled. Raeder had a ready answer: seize Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, and the Canary Islands. Once the Suez was captured, German forces could advance through Palestine and Syria as far as the Turkish border. He also stated (correctly) that the United States would eventually enter the war on the side of the United Kingdom, and the Anglo-American and Gaullist forces would try to take advantage of the weakness of Vichy France to seize French North Africa. Germany, he declared, should preempt them by taking this strategically important region themselves. The Grand Admiral was, in fact, trying to convince Hitler to adopt a peripheral strategy against the

British Empire by striking it in what he considered to be vulnerable areas: the Near and Middle East, the Iberian peninsula, and Africa.

Erich Raeder certainly gave Hitler enough to think about. The dictator ordered the National Defense Department of OKW (General Warlimont and his staff) to study the proposed operations, while he discussed them with Mussolini, Franco, and Petain. He arranged to meet with Franco at Hendaye, a small town on the French-Spanish border, on October 23—beginning one of the most frustrating weeks of Adolf Hitler's life.

Franco refused to enter the war on the side of the Third Reich and would not cooperate with the plan to seize Gibraltar. In the end, he agreed to sign a treaty with Germany, but he insisted on so many restrictions and reservations that it would have amounted to little more than a mutual expression of good will, which is all Hitler could get out of the nine-hour conference. He later told Mussolini, ''Rather than go through that again, I would prefer to have two or three teeth pulled out.''[14]

The following day, Hitler met with Marshal Petain at Montoire, which was within the German zone of occupation. Hitler respected the 84-year-old victor of Verdun; however, he was no more successful with him than with Franco. Petain also refused to enter the war on the side of the Third Reich.

The Hendaye and Montoire conferences doomed Raeder's effort to develop a peripheral strategy against the British Empire. Predictably, Hitler was in a foul mood when he arrived in Munich on October 27, but, instead of going to Berchtesgaden or returning to Berlin, he reboarded his train and headed south, for Italy, because rumors had reached his ears that Mussolini intended to invade Greece. The Fuehrer had no territorial ambitions in the Balkans, which he rightly regarded as a powder keg. Now that Germany had succeeded in penetrating the region economically, Hitler's only desire was that peace be maintained in those troubled lands. His sole reason for going to Italy was to prevent his Axis partner from doing anything foolish in that region.

However, when Hitler dismounted his train in Florence on the morning of October 28, Mussolini greeted him with these incredible words: ''Fuehrer, we are on the march! Victorious Italian troops crossed the Greco-Albanian frontier at dawn today!''

NOTES

1. Galland, pp. 46, 78.
2. Telford Taylor, *The Breaking Wave* (1967), p. 204 (hereafter cited as Taylor, *Breaking Wave*).
3. Shirer, p. 781.

4. Walter A. Musciano, *Messerschmitt Aces* (1982), p. 20.
5. Wood and Gunston, pp. 170–71.
6. Edwin P. Hoyt, *The U-Boat Wars* (1984; reprint ed., 1986), pp. 69–80 (hereafter cited as Hoyt).
7. Baldwin, *Critical Years*, pp. 162–63.
8. Gerhard Schreiber, ''The Mediterranean in Hitler's Strategy in 1940. 'Programme' and Military Planning,'' in *The German Military in the Age of Total War,* Wilhelm Deist, ed. (1985), p. 243 (hereafter cited as Schreiber).
9. Walter Warlimont, ''German Estimate of the United States, Russia, and Dakar,'' ETHINT 8, August 9, 1945.
10. H. W. Koch, ''Hitler's 'Programme' and the Genesis of Operation 'Barbarossa','' in Koch, *Aspects*, p. 319.
11. See Halder Diaries, July 22, 1940 and subsequent entries; also see *DGFP*, vol. 10, pp. 549–50.
12. Foerster, ''Volkegemeinschaft,'' p. 213.
13. Schreiber, p. 244.
14. Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler* (1973), p. 407 (hereafter cited as Payne).

CHAPTER XXV

HITLER COMES TO THE AID OF HIS ALLY

MUSSOLINI'S INVASION OF GREECE

Like most of Mussolini's military campaigns, his Greek adventure was a disaster. General Sebastiano Viscounti-Prasca's invasion forces (140,000 men in six divisions, plus one in reserve) attacked with two corps abreast, one on either side of the Pindus mountain range. The offensive developed into a three-prong thrust along a 140-mile front, with the northern thrust aimed at Salonika on the northern Aegean coast and the southern wing heading south, down the Adriatic coast. The middle attack was aimed at Metzovon Pass, a strategic point on the Pindus Mountains.[1] By sheer weight of numbers, the Italians (who outnumbered the Greeks six to one) made progress through the mountainous terrain, in spite of the terrible weather. The initial objective in the center was the town of Kalpaki, from which they planned to drive on to Janina, and then to the Metzovon Pass. The Italians captured Kalpaki on October 29, and by November 2 had taken the Grambala Heights, overlooking the town. Here, 15 miles from Metzovon Pass, they were checked. The Greeks counterattacked and recaptured the heights on November 3; the Italians retook the place on the 8th, but the Greeks took it back the same day. An Italian effort to retake the heights the following day was repulsed.

Mussolini responded to this defeat by sacking Visconti-Prasca on November 9 and replacing him with General Ubaldo Soddu, the undersecretary of state for war and deputy chief of the General Staff of the Army, but a poor field commander. He would last only seven weeks. On December 4, the Duce also fired Marshal Badoglio, chief of the General Staff of the Army since 1925 (described by Baldwin as ''old and indecisive, a weak man''[2]) and replaced him with General Ugo

Cavallero. Count Galeazzo Ciano, the son-in-law of the dictator and a major instigator of the war, was not punished nor, of course, was Mussolini himself.

The appointment of Cavallero genuinely astonished the Italian people. He had been involved in a naval construction scandal in the 1930s and was widely regarded as a crook who had narrowly avoided prison. He owed his new position solely to his political influence with Mussolini. Naturally, the average Italian soldier had little confidence in him, and his appointment did nothing to improve sagging Italian morale. Before the campaign was over, however, the suave Cavallero would have the dual role of chief of staff and field commander in Albania.

Meanwhile, the Greeks mobilized. Ultimately, Greek President Joannis Metaxas—who had German military training—was able to reinforce his field commander, General Alexandros Papagos, to a strength of five corps: 15 infantry divisions, four infantry brigades, and a cavalry division.[3] They launched a massive counteroffensive at dawn on November 14. By November 17, the Italians were in full retreat all along the front. By the end of December, Mussolini had lost 20,000 men killed, 40,000 wounded, and 26,000 captured or missing. An additional 18,000 had been crippled with frostbite. The Greeks overran the southern quarter of Albania and did not halt until December 28, because they had outrun their supply lines. Although they had gained an impressive amount of ground and held a line running from Pogradec in the east to the Ionian Sea just north of Khimara in the west, the Greeks could not advance much further in any case; on the flatter terrain to the north, the Greek infantry would have met Italian armored units, and the Greeks had virtually no tanks and almost no anti-tank weapons. As a result, the front stabilized along the Pogradec-Khimara line, and the war was stalemated. Meanwhile, much to Hitler's chagrin, Mussolini's ill-planned invasion opened the door to British intervention in the Balkans. On October 29, the day after the Italian attack began, British troops began to land on the strategic island of Crete, and, on November 3, the first Royal Air Force units landed on the mainland of Greece.

Adolf Hitler was irritated. Contrary to all of his carefully laid plans, the Balkans had become a theater of war. The next day, he ordered the General Staff to prepare plans for the invasion of Greece.

NORTH AFRICA: THE ROUT OF THE ROMANS

And what was happening in North Africa while Mussolini was busy plotting his Greek disaster? The answer was, very little. Italy, it will be recalled, declared war on France and Great Britain on June 10. In North Africa, Italy appeared to have an overwhelming advantage over the

British in 1940. Marshal Rudolfo Graziani had 250,000 men. He was opposed by the Western Desert Force (later designated XIII Corps) under Lieutenant General Sir Richard O'Connor, which consisted of only two understrength divisions. All totaled, O'Connor could muster only about 30,000 combat effectives.

In war, numbers can be quite misleading. Nowhere is the truth of this statement better illustrated than in North Africa in 1940. The Italian Army was one of the worst in Europe. Its weapons dated from World War I, and it had few anti-tank weapons, had little modern artillery, was badly fed, was indifferently equipped, and had bad morale and low fighting spirit. Its tanks were called ''self-propelled coffins'' by the rank and file and were no match for even the poorest British tank. Even more seriously in the desert, its infantry was non-motorized or ''marching infantry'' and, as the British would soon prove, mobility in the desert was essential not for victory, but for mere survival; yet the Italian soldier walked everywhere he went. Under such a handicap, he could easily be cut off or bypassed by the fast, mobile British.

Graziani did not want to attack at all; then, on September 13, Mussolini gave him a choice: invade Egypt within two days or be relieved of his command. Graziani's strike force, General Mario Berti's 10th Army, crossed the ''wire'' (the Egyptian-Libyan border) on September 15. His spearheads reached the village of Sidi Barrani, 65 miles inside Egypt, on September 16. Here, to the surprise of the British, the Italians halted, rested, and began building up supplies and strong points. Despite their overwhelming numbers, they completely surrendered the initiative to their opponents.

While the Italians did nothing and the Western Desert Force prepared for an offensive of its own, Hitler made his first overture to Mussolini concerning the possibility of using panzer units in the desert. The Italian dictator turned him down flat, telling one of his generals that, if the Germans ever got a foothold in North Africa, they would never get them out.

Meanwhile, the naval war in the Mediterranean began in earnest, and the Italians suffered a shattering defeat. On November 11, 1940, the Royal Navy escorted the aircraft carrier *Illustrious* to within 170 miles of the huge Italian naval base at Taranto, on the heel of the Italian ''boot.'' At 9 P.M., it launched 21 Swordfish airplanes—slow, lumbering, obsolete biplanes. Just before midnight, they attacked the Italian battleships, which were at anchor in the harbor. The *Cavour* was so heavily damaged that it was never used again. (It was refloated but still unrepaired at the end of the war.) The *Littorio* was knocked out of action for five months, and the *Duilio* was nonoperational for about six months. In one action, according to Admiral Andrew B. Cunningham, the commander of the British Mediterranean Fleet, 21 obsolete biplanes

had inflicted more damage on the Italian Fleet than the Royal Navy had inflicted on the German High Seas Fleet in the Battle of Jutland.[4] ''Half of the Italian battlefleet had been put out of action ... by the expenditure of 11 torpedoes and the loss of two aircraft.''[5]

More important even than these losses was the permanent effect the Battle of Taranto had on the morale of the Italian Navy. It never did attempt to challenge the Royal Navy to a major battle on the high seas, not even in 1941, when it had every chance of winning such a battle. In fact, the Italian surface fleet became an international joke. ''While the U.S. Navy drinks whiskey and the British Navy prefers rum, the Italian Navy sticks to port,'' the BBC quipped.[6] This they certainly did. Taranto seemed to convince the Italian Navy of its own inferiority in relation to the British, and it never recovered its morale throughout the war.

In the meantime, O'Connor and his superior, General Sir Archibald Wavell, prepared to deal a devastating blow to the Italian Army. Wavell liked to do the unexpected. ''Never let yourself be trammeled by the bonds of orthodoxy,'' he said. ''Always think for yourself ... and remember that the herd is usually wrong.''[7] Under Wavell's direction, O'Connor massed a fully motorized strike force of 31,000 men and 275 tanks near Graziani's Sidi Barrani concentration and launched a surprise offensive at 7 A.M. on December 9. Before the day was over, he had captured 81,000 Italians. Astonished by his success, Wavell quickly developed his limited objective offensive into a full-scale invasion of Libya. By December 16, the Italian 10th Army was a disorganized rabble as men threw away their weapons and streamed to the rear, hoping to find safety in the coastal fortresses of Bardia and Tobruk. But there was no safety in either place.

O'Connor attacked Bardia on January 3, 1941. Two days later, it was all over. The British captured another 45,000 prisoners, along with 462 guns, 127 inferior tanks, and 700 rucks. They suffered fewer than 500 casualties.

The fall of Bardia staggered the Italians. If the Allies could not be halted at Bardia, which was generally considered the best fortress in Libya, then where could they be stopped? Suddenly, Italian resistance collapsed everywhere. Tobruk fell on January 22, after resisting for two days. It yielded 25,000 more prisoners and 87 tanks, at a cost of less than 400 Allied casualties. Sollum and Derna also quickly collapsed, and Benghazi was encircled on February 3. Finally, on February 6, 3,000 British and Australian troops, supported by only 32 tanks, cut off the remnants of the Italian 10th Army at Beda Fomm, well south of the Cyrenaican capital. They captured 20,000 Italians, who had 216 field guns and about 100 tanks. ''The police in Tel Aviv gave us a better fight than this,'' one Australian observed.[8] Finally, Benghazi capitulated on February 7, and the British halted their offensive at El Agheila,

within striking distance of Tripoli, the last major seat of resistance in what was left of Italian North Africa. In less than two months the Italians had lost 130,000 men, 1,300 guns, 380 tanks, and 241 aircraft. In the process, they had inflicted fewer than 2,000 casualties (500 killed, 1,373 wounded, and 55 missing) on the forces of the British Empire.[9] All that remained of Mussolini's previously vast North African possessions was Tripoli, which was defended by a makeshift garrison of two infantry divisions, a reinforced artillery regiment, and remnants of three other divisions, all holding a 12-mile semicircular perimeter around the city. Clearly, one more push would have wiped out the Italian Empire in North Africa.

''The Italian troops had, with good reason, lost all confidence in their arms and acquired a very serious inferiority complex, which was to remain with them throughout the war,'' Erwin Rommel observed.[10]

Adolf Hitler also had some observations to make. On February 6, he told his staff officers:

> The loss of North Africa could be withstood in a military sense but have a strong psychological effect on Italy. Britain could hold a pistol at Italy's head.... The British would have the free use of a dozen divisions and could employ them most dangerously.... We must make every effort to prevent this.[11]

After conferring with Mussolini at the end of January, Hitler decided to send a force of two divisions to North Africa, to tie down the Western Desert Force and save the remnants of Tripoltania for his embarrassed ally, who was now definitely the junior partner in the Axis. This force, soon to become famous worldwide as the Afrika Korps (*Deutsche Afrika Korps* or DAK), consisted of the 5th Light and 15th Panzer Divisions. Initially, Major General Baron Hans von Funck, the commander of the 5th Light, was selected to command the new corps; however, he briefed Hitler on the situation in early February, and the Fuehrer was singularly unimpressed. Consequently, on February 6, Hitler named Erwin Rommel commander of the DAK and the German forces in Libya. Baron von Funck (who was held in higher esteem by OKH than by Hitler) succeeded Rommel as commander of the 7th Panzer Division, which was then on garrison duty in France. Two days later, the first German units left Naples by sea for Tripoli. The legend of the Desert Fox had begun.

NOTES

1. Jon Guttman, ''Bid for Roman Empire,'' *World War II*, vol. 5, no. 4 (November 1990), p. 24 (hereafter cited as Guttman, ''Bid'').
2. Baldwin, *Critical Years*, p. 160.
3. Guttman, ''Bid,'' p. 24.

4. Baldwin, *Critical Years*, p. 160.
5. Playfair, vol. 1, pp. 237–38.
6. Reynolds and Eleanor Packard, *Balcony Empire* (1942), p. 25 (hereafter cited as Packard).
7. John Strawson, *The Battle for North Africa* (1969), p. 10 (hereafter cited as Strawson).
8. Richard L. Collier and the editors of Time-Life Books, *War in the Desert* (1979), p. 32 (hereafter cited as Collier).
9. Goralski, p. 146.
10. Rommel Papers, p. 97.
11. Desmond Young, *Rommel: Desert Fox* (1950 edition), p. 82 (hereafter cited as Young, *Rommel*).

CHAPTER XXVI
THE BALKANS CAMPAIGN

STALEMATE

Why did the British fail to destroy the remnants of Graziani's decimated Italian forces and completely annihilate the Fascist empire in North Africa before the Afrika Korps could come to Mussolini's aid? The reason was Winston Churchill. He and his advisers had no doubt that every effort should be made to help the Greeks, so they sent their best forces from Libya to Greece. Both Wavell and Eden pointed out that it was bad strategy to split their efforts between these two places; the best thing to do would be to complete the conquest of North Africa and then send aid to Greece. In Churchill's view, however, the Greek situation had priority over all others. During the first week of November, without bothering to consult with Wavell, Churchill began to strip Middle East Command of its aircraft.

In the meantime, Adolf Hitler was not idle. Mussolini's blunder and the incompetence of his military commanders, coupled with increased Soviet pressure on Bulgaria, forced him to draw the conclusion that the Balkan countries must be officially brought into the Axis immediately, or they might eventually end up on the side of the Allies. On November 20, 1940, Hungary formally acceded to the Tripartite Pact between Germany, Italy, and Japan (which had been signed on September 27, 1940). Three days later Romania signed and agreed to accept a second German division (the 16th Panzer). Despite the pressure that Hitler exerted, both diplomatically and in a personal interview, King Boris of Bulgaria balked at formally allying with the Axis, but agreed to provide Germany with whatever facilities she needed within her borders, mainly because he preferred Hitler's ''protection'' to Stalin's. Yugoslavia and Turkey remained noncommittal.

Meanwhile, Hitler tried to divert Russian expansionist ambitions into channels other than the Balkans. He wanted to interest Stalin and

his colleagues in a southern drive to the Persian Gulf or the Arabian Sea. The Soviets, however, were more interested in the Dardanelles and the Danube area, which put their political and military aspirations on a collision course with the economic interests of the Third Reich. The overall deterioration in relations led to a summit conference between Molotov and Hitler and von Ribbentrop in Berlin on November 12 and 13, 1940. Hitler and Ribbentrop tried to divert Soviet territorial aspirations to the south, toward the Indian Ocean, but the Soviet foreign minister bluntly demanded, among other things, that Germany withdraw its protection from Finland (from which the Reich received 60 percent of its nickel), revoke its guarantee of Romania's frontiers, and support Moscow's claim to Southern Bukovina. These things Hitler refused to do and the meetings broke up with hard feelings all around.

If these failed negotiations did not finally convinced Hitler to invade the Soviet Union in the spring of 1941, the dispatch that Molotov handed Ambassador von der Schulenburg in Moscow on November 25 concluded the matter. As a price for joining the Tripartite Pact, Stalin demanded the withdrawal of all German forces from Finland. Russia was to receive land and naval bases and the right to station troops at the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles; should Turkey balk at this demand, Germany and the other Tripartite powers would take military action against her. The Kremlin demanded that Berlin recognize Soviet claims to the territory south of Baku and Batum, in the direction of the Persian Gulf. Also, Japan would have to cede its concessions for the exploitation of oil and coal resources in North Sakhalin to Russia, and all secret Russo-German treaties would be abrogated in Russia's favor. Stalin also in effect demanded control of the Persian Gulf and Arabian oilfields, which supplied Europe with much of its oil.[1]

Hitler read the dispatch, lay it on his desk, and did not bother to reply. ''The dice had been cast,'' Koch wrote later.[2] He ordered Halder to bring him the General Staff's plan for the invasion of the Soviet Union. After a four-hour conference, he approved it on December 5. Among other things, the plan called for preparations to be completed by May 15, 1941, which was the target date for the invasion to begin. In the meantime, Hitler had to clear up the situation in the Balkans.

BEFORE THE STORM

The Balkan situation smoldered throughout the winter of 1940–41, as an uneasy stalemate descended on the region. On January 29, 1941, General Metaxas died after a short illness and was replaced as premier by Alexander Koryzis, a civilian who lacked Metaxas's decisiveness and ability to rally the nation. Meanwhile, the Wehrmacht prepared for the invasion of Greece and steadily infiltrated its men into Bulgaria.

Several hundred Luftwaffe personnel, dressed in civilian clothes, were already preparing landing fields for the Stukas and other airplanes and were getting ready for the arrival of the VIII Air Corps. Elsewhere, engineers and technicians studied the Bulgarian transportation system, and Hitler and the German diplomats continued to try to induce Yugoslavia and Bulgaria into joining the Tripartite Pact.

On January 23, 1940, Bulgaria secretly agreed to join the Axis, but, because of its fear of Turkey's reaction, delayed the actual signing for six weeks, until German engineers could complete the bridging of the Danube, and German troops from northern Dobruja were in a position to enter the country in strength. In exchange for the alliance, Ribbentrop and Ciano assured the Bulgarians that the postwar Balkan frontiers would give Bulgaria an outlet to the Aegean. (This alliance, incidentally, cost King Carol his life; he was poisoned by unknown assassins in 1943.)

By the end of January, the German plan for the invasion of Greece was far advanced. By that time, the headquarters of the 12th Army (Wilhelm List) and the 1st Panzer Group (Ewald von Kleist) were in Romania, as were three corps headquarters and four full-strength divisions, two of which were panzer. Bulgaria signed the Tripartite Pact in Vienna on March 1, and German troops officially entered Bulgaria at 6 A.M. on March 2. Simultaneously, Baron von Richthofen's VIII Air Corps began moving into the country and was almost completely operational by March 4.

The German entry into Bulgaria sent shock waves through Belgrade and Athens. Defeatism became widespread in Greece, as few in the government or the general population had any illusions that they could defeat the Italians *and* the Germans. Athens did, however, finally agree to accept British ground forces, leading Churchill to immediately strip Wavell and the Western Desert Force of its best ground units, some of which were already prepared for immediate shipment. The first British units arrived in Greece on March 7. Eventually, the British Expeditionary Force (under General Maitland ''Jumbo'' Wilson) was suppose to include three infantry divisions, the 1st Armored Brigade, and the Polish Brigade, but only 58,000 men (excluding air force personnel) had arrived when the German attack broke.

In the meantime, the Yugoslavs, now isolated by the Bulgarian decision to join the Axis, were more willing to discuss signing the Tripartite Pact, and Prince Regent Paul met with Hitler at the Berghof on March 4. In the end, however, the prince regent, who was personally pro-British, said that he wished to reserve his decision.[3]

Diplomatic haggling with Yugoslavia continued for some time, but made no progress, despite Hitler's willingness to make concessions. Finally, on March 22, the Crown Council seemed on the verge of

accepting Hitler's offers, when its three Serbian ministers resigned in protest. It would take time to replace them, and Yugoslavia's decision on the pact was again postponed. This was too much for von Ribbentrop. On March 23, he gave Belgrade a deadline of March 25.[4]

Ribbentrop's deadline (it was not quite an ultimatum) did the trick, and Prince Paul decided to join the Axis. On March 25, Prime Minister Dragisha Cvetkovic and Foreign Minister Aleksander Cincar-Marcovic signed the Tripartite Pact in Vienna. Hitler, much relieved, was delighted by the prince's decision, but his diplomatic victory was destined to be short lived.

Unfortunately for the Yugoslav government, it had done nothing to prepare its people for this radical change of policy. During the night of March 26–27, a military coup overthrew the government. When Hitler awoke on March 27, he learned that 17-year-old King Peter II had acceded to the Yugoslavian throne and Prince Paul and his family had been exiled to Greece. At the same time, Cvetkovic had been replaced by General Dusan Simovic, the Pan-Slavic commander of the Yugoslav Air Force, who was known to be anti-German—and was even suspected of being a Russian agent.[5] His first act was to seal the country's frontiers. Belgrade and several other Serbian cities were rocked by anti-German demonstrations, and the Yugoslav Army mobilized on March 29, even though the new Yugoslavian foreign minister, Momcilo Nincic, immediately assured the German ambassador that his country wanted to maintain friendly relations with Germany.

Adolf Hitler did not believe Nincic's assurances of friendship and neutrality. At 1 P.M. on March 27, he met with Keitel, Jodl, Brauchitsch, Halder, Goering, Jeschonnek, and Ribbentrop and told them that, sooner or later, the Yugoslavians would join the Western Allies. Therefore, he had decided to ''destroy Yugoslavia as a military power and a sovereign state with a minimum of delay.'' He asked Brauchitsch and Goering to submit their plans for the invasion of Yugoslavia as quickly as possible.[6]

Aware that the Germans were feverishly preparing to invade, the Simovic government did everything it could to meet the threat. Simovic even sent a delegation to Moscow, to sign a pact of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union. Stalin, however, did not want a military showdown with the Wehrmacht, so they signed a treaty of friendship and non-aggression two days later.

Working under tremendous pressure, OKH developed an outline plan for the combined invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia within 24 hours of the coup in Belgrade. List's 12th Army (which controlled the 1st Panzer Group) retained responsibility for the Greek invasion, but its area of operation was extended to include southern Yugoslavia. Colonel General Baron Maximilian von Weichs's 2nd Army (which

was in Munich, while its training divisions were stationed in southern Germany) was sent to Graz, Austria, and was given the task of capturing Belgrade and overrunning northern Yugoslavia.

On the afternoon of March 29, Lieutenant General Friedrich Paulus, the deputy chief of staff for operations at OKH, presided over a special conference in Vienna, in which the final details for the invasions were worked out. Also present were Field Marshal List; Baron von Weichs; Colonel General von Kleist, commander of the 1st Panzer Group (formerly Panzer Group Kleist); and their chiefs of staff. Final dispositions for the offensive were made, movement schedules were hammered out, and the timetable for the invasion was determined.

Hitler's original plan for Operation 25 called for an air bombardment of Belgrade and air attacks against the ground installations of the Yugoslavian Air Force to take place on April 1. The invasion of Greece (Operation Marita) would begin on April 2 or 3, followed by the ground invasion of Yugoslavia between April 8 and 15. The generals, however, took the sensible step of delaying the initial air attacks so that they would coincide more closely with the ground attack on Greece. Under the revised timetable, the air attack would be launched on April 6; simultaneously, 12th Army would attack Greece, and the XXXXVI Panzer Corps of 2nd Army would attack into Yugoslavia, seize the bridges over the Drava River, and begin the drive on Belgrade on April 8. The entire 2nd Army would go over to the offensive by April 12.

Basically, the German plan envisioned concentric and converging attacks against Yugoslavia and Greece from Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. The German attack forces included 27 divisions (seven of them panzer), with some ancillary help from General Vittorio Ambrosio's 2nd Italian Army (attacking from the Trieste area of Italy into northwestern Yugoslavia) and the Hungarian 3rd Army, driving southward into Yugoslavia. The invasions would be supported by more than 1,000 aircraft, controlled by Colonel General Alexander Loehr's 4th Air Fleet.

Second Army assembled in Austria and Hungary within days. Its rapid concentration was almost unprecedented in its speed, flexibility, and efficiency. Three of its divisions were moved from Germany, four from France, one from Czechoslovakia, and one from the Soviet frontier. They moved by rail and road, but, despite a brilliant logistical effort, icy roads delayed several units and some divisions went into action in piecemeal fashion. Others could not arrive at their assembly areas until after the invasion began, which is why the Vienna staff conference decided to stagger the offensive of the 2nd Army. Table 26.1 shows the Order of Battle of the ground forces earmarked for the conquest of the Balkans.

Loehr's air fleet also produced a masterpiece of rapid deployment and makeshift logistical planning. On March 27, it consisted of 135 fighter and reconnaissance aircraft in Romania and 355 bombers and

Table 26.1
Order of Battle, Axis Forces Involved in the Invasions of Yugoslavia and Greece, April 6, 1941

Supreme Commander: Adolf Hitler
OKH: Field Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch
Chief of Staff: Colonel General Franz Halder
2nd Italian Army: General Vittorio Ambrosio
2nd Army: Colonel General Baron Maximilian von Weichs
  XXXXIX Mountain Corps: General of Mountain Troops Ludwig Kuebler
    1st Mountain and 538th Frontier Guard Divisions
  LI Corps: General of Infantry Hans Reinhardt
    101st Light, 132nd Infantry, and 183rd Infantry Divisions
  LII Corps: General of Infantry Kurt von Briesen
    79th and 125th Infantry Divisions[b]
  XXXXVI Panzer Corps: General of Panzer Troops Heinrich von Vietinghoff
    8th Panzer, 14th Panzer, and 16th Motorized Divisions
3rd Hungarian Army
  XXXXI Panzer Corps: General of Panzer Troops Georg-Hans Reinhardt[c]
    2nd SS Motorized Division ''Das Reich,'' the Gross Deutschland Motorized Infantry Regiment[a], and the ''Hermann Goering'' Panzer Regiment
1st Panzer Group: Colonel General Ewald von Kleist[d]
  XIV Panzer Corps: General of Infantry Gustav von Wietersheim
    5th Panzer, 11th Panzer, 294th Infantry, and 4th Mountain Divisions
  XI Corps: General of Infantry Joachim von Kortzfleisch
    60th Motorized Infantry Division[e]
12th Army: Field Marshal Wilhelm List
  XXXX Panzer Corps: General of Panzer Troops Georg Stumme
    9th Panzer Division, 73rd Infantry Division, 1st SS Mtz. Infantry Regiment[a]
  XVIII Mountain Corps: General of Mountain Troops Franz Boehme
    2nd Panzer Division, 5th Mountain Division, 6th Mountain Division, 72nd Infantry Division, 125th Infantry Regiment[a]
  XXX Corps: General of Artillery Otto Hartmann
    50th Infantry and 164th Infantry Divisions
  L Corps: General of Cavalry Georg Lindemann[b]
    46th, 76th and 198th Infantry Divisions[b]
  16th Panzer Division[f]

Notes:
[a]A reinforced (or augmented) unit
[b]Did not arrive in time to participate in the campaign
[c]Initially, XXXXI Panzer Corps was directly subordinate to OKH
[d]Initially part of 12th Army; attached to 2nd Army on April 13.
[e]Several other units were attached to XI Corps, but did not arrive in time to participate in the campaign.
[f]Deployed behind Turkish-Bulgarian border, to help the Bulgarian Army in case of a Turkish attack.
Source:
United States Department of the Army, ''The German Campaigns in the Balkans (Spring, 1941),'' United States Department of the Army, Pamphlet 20–260 (1953).

dive-bombers in Bulgaria. Then it was given the additional task of supporting the invasion of Yugoslavia. From as far away as Sicily, Africa, and France, more than 600 bombers, dive-bombers, fighters, and reconnaissance aircraft assembled on primitive airfields in Austria, Bulgaria, and Romania, and were fully operational within 10 days.

At the beginning of April 1941, the Yugoslav Army consisted of 17 regular and 12 reserve infantry divisions, six combined-arms brigades, three regular cavalry divisions, three reserve cavalry brigades, a fortress division, a fortress brigade, 23 frontier guard battalions, and several miscellaneous units. It fully mobilized strength was more than 1 million men; however, it was never fully mobilized. North to south, it deployed as follows:

- 1st Army Group (7th and 4th Armies): responsible for defending northern Yugoslavia, including the Croatian capital of Zagreb
- 2nd Army Group (2nd and 1st Armies): defending north-central Yugoslavia, and generally deployed along the Hungarian frontier
- 6th Army: deployed opposite the Romanian frontier, defended Belgrade
- 3rd Army Group (5th and 3rd Armies): defended along the Bulgarian and Bulgarian-Albanian frontiers, respectively

Although it looked respectable on paper, the Yugoslav Army was poorly equipped and in desperate need of modernization. It had 700 airplanes, but all of them were obsolete. Its tanks were made by Czechoslovakians and lacked spare parts, because the Germans occupied the Skoda Works in early 1939. In addition, it lacked training in, and had almost no knowledge of, modern Blitzkrieg warfare, and it was badly disposed. Like the Poles in 1939, the Yugoslavs tried to defend their entire frontier (1,900 miles), ignoring Frederick the Great, who said, ''He who defends everything defends nothing.'' The adage was even more applicable in 1940 than it was when the great king said it.

The Greek Army was badly equipped and not disposed to meet a German attack, even though it was obvious that one was coming. Most of it (14 divisions) was on the Greek left flank, in Albania, under the control of the 1st Army. It had done all it could do against the numerically superior Italians and should have pulled back to a shorter line to the south. The Greek government, however, refused to withdraw it for political reasons. Likewise, on the right flank, the government insisted on posting the 2nd Army (70,000 men in four divisions) in the so-called Metaxas Line, near the Bulgarian border, so that it could hold Eastern Macedonia and as much Greek territory as possible. Because of the Greek government's persistent refusal to withdraw to a shorter and more defensible line to the south, they were badly overextended and in a strategically unsound position.

The Greek center was weak. It was defended by Force W, which consisted of the Army of Central Macedonia (three understrength divisions), and the I Australian Corps of the B.E.F. (two divisions and the 1st Armored Brigade), all under the command of ''Jumbo'' Wilson. Additional troops (another Australian division and the Polish Brigade) were on the way but did not arrive in time.

Force W had the task of defending a line in the Vermion Mountains south of the Yugoslav frontier. The line was placed there because one of the most suitable areas for panzer operations in all of Greece was the Plain of Thessaly, which lay just south of Wilson's line. If the Germans could sweep through southern Yugoslavia and past the left flank of Force W, they would be in good tank country, and the Allied forces could be crushed. This is what Force W was suppose to prevent, but the Germans struck too rapidly. By D-Day, the center of the Allied line was still weak and incompletely held. If Germans attacked through southern Yugoslavia, they could outflank Force W without difficulty.

As a result of their poor deployment, the Greeks opposed the Italians with 14 divisions. They only had seven weak divisions left to oppose the German Army, which was the best in the world at that time. In addition, the Greek Air Force had been in combat for months and had suffered such heavy losses on the Albanian Front that it was virtually nonoperational by April 1941. The Royal Air Force units in Greece only had 80 serviceable aircraft when Hitler's legions struck on April 6.

THE CONQUEST OF YUGOSLAVIA

Richthofen's VIII Air Corps began the invasion with a massive terror-bombing raid on the Yugoslav capital on the morning of Sunday, April 6. The strike force included seven bomber groups, three Stuka groups, and a twin-engine fighter group. The Yugoslavian Air Force was quickly annihilated. The few Yugoslav flak guns that defended the capital were quickly knocked out, while Richthofen's bombers and dive-bombers attacked at house top level and smashed everything in sight. ''The scream of Stukas [is] ... like no sound ever heard in all the universe,'' one survivor recalled:

> Bomb after bomb exploded ... the effect almost inconceivable ... It was the perfectly appalling wind that was most terrifying. It drove like something solid through the house: every door that was latched simply burst off its hinges, every pane of glass flew into splinters, the curtains stood straight out into the room and fell back in ribbons. Everything that stood loose hit the opposite wall and was smashed. The ceilings fell with hardly a noticeable sound in the earth-shaking uproar. Then, with a weird, smooth sound like the tearing of heavy silk the neighboring houses began to collapse.[7]

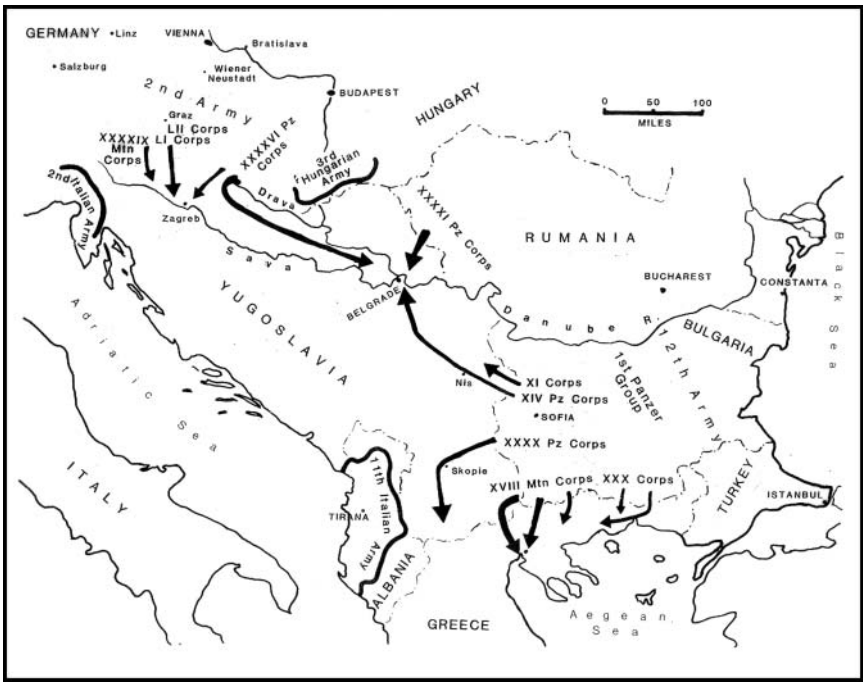
The city was bombed for an hour and a half. More than 17,000 people were killed in the destruction of Belgrade, which burned for some time. In addition, the military command posts and communication centers were all knocked out, as was the palace and the government buildings. The Yugoslavs lost all central direction of their armed forces from the first hour of the campaign, and, as a result, were never able to put up effective resistance.

Baron von Richthofen lost two airplanes in the raid.

Meanwhile, the German ground units jumped off, and three separate forces converged on Belgrade from three different directions: the 1st Panzer Group from the southeast, the XXXXI Panzer Corps from the north, and the XXXXVI Panzer Corps of the 2nd Army from the northwest, as Figure 26.1 shows.

Kleist's 1st Panzer Group had the most difficult task, because the Yugoslav 5th Army was the best in the country, with a high percentage of regular troops, and it put up tough resistance initially. When the XIV Panzer Corps broke through, however, the Yugoslav commander

Figure 26.1
The Conquest of Yugoslavia



ordered his troops to withdraw behind the Morava River. The nonmotorized Yugoslavs could not perform this maneuver, because the panzers moved too rapidly, and the retreating Slavs were quickly swamped. On April 9, Nis fell, the Yugoslav front collapsed, and Kleist turned northward for Belgrade. Because of his rapid success, 5th Panzer Division was diverted south and joined the XXXX Panzer Corps of the 12th Army for the Greek campaign.

In the meantime, Reinhardt's XXXXI Panzer Corps smashed the Yugoslav 6th Army near Pancevo, which fell on April 11. By April 12, Reinhardt's tanks were only 45 miles north of Belgrade and were advancing on the capital against only sporadic resistance.

To the north, XXXXVI Panzer Corps of Weichs's 2nd Army quickly broke through the Yugoslav 4th Army, which was made up mainly of Croats. Many Croat units mutinied and refused to fire on the Germans, who they hailed as liberators from Serbian oppression. By the morning of April 10, Weichs's spearhead was across the Drava and was driving southeast, between the Drava and Sava Rivers, for the Serbian capital.

All three converging forces reached Belgrade almost simultaneously. The honor of capturing the city, however, went to 28-year-old *SS-Obersturmfuehrer* (1st Lieutenant) Fritz Klingenberg, the tall, blonde, youthful looking commander of the 2nd Motorcycle Company of the 2nd SS Motorized Division. Racing ahead with his company, Klingenberg found the Danube bridges destroyed, so he led an 11-man patrol across the river in pneumatic boats. He entered the city unmolested, freed the German embassy staff (which had been interned) and at 5 P.M. hoisted the swastika flag over the German legation. At 6:45 P.M., accompanied by Colonel Rudolf Toussaint (the former German military attaché to Belgrade, whom he had freed), Klingenberg accepted the surrender of the mayor of Belgrade. For his daring actions, young Klingenberg was awarded the Knight's Cross on May 14.

With the fall of the city, 1st Panzer Group was transferred to the control of the 2nd Army, while von Vietinghoff's XXXXVI Panzer Corps was placed under Kleist's command for the next phase of the operation: the mopping up and final destruction of the remnants of the Yugoslav Army.

Northern Yugoslavia fell quickly. The German 2nd Army bypassed most of the Yugoslavian 7th Army and met only sporadic resistance from the 4th and 2nd. At one point, the Germans burst into a Yugoslav base and found an officers' party in progress. A hasty surrender was concluded, and then the party resumed, as if nothing unusual had happened. The Croatian government broke with Belgrade on April 10, and (with Hitler's blessing and the support of the Abwehr) declared itself an independent country. It called on its nationals to stop fighting the Germans. Many Croats, however, had already released themselves.

Virtually the entire Yugoslav 4th Army had mutinied by this time, and Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, was seized by Croatian rebels. When the troops of the 14th Panzer Division (LI Corps) arrived on April 10, they were greeted as liberators by a wildly cheering pro-German populace. During its drive on the city, the 14th Panzer took more than l5,000 prisoners, including 300 officers and 22 generals, among which were the commanders of the 1st Army Group and 7th Army.[8] Elsewhere, in the zone of the XXXXIX Mountain Corps, the Slovenian government followed the lead of the Croatians and declared its independence on April 11. The capital of Celje surrendered to Major General Hubert Lanz's 1st Mountain Division that same day. Meanwhile, the Italian 2nd Army advanced rapidly against the Yugoslav 7th Army and took 30,000 prisoners, while the Hungarian 3rd Army brushed aside the Yugoslav 1st Army. According to the U.S. Army's excellent study of the campaign, however, both the Italians and the Hungarians ''displayed great reluctance to attack until the enemy had been soundly beaten and thoroughly disorganized by the Germans.''[9]

After the collapse of the frontier defense system and the fall of Belgrade, the Yugoslav leaders tried to withdraw the remnants of their army to a mountain redoubt in the interior of Serbia. Weichs launched a rapid pursuit of the Yugoslavs, who were withdrawing in the general direction of Sarajevo. Speed was now of the essence, because OKH wanted to end the campaign as rapidly as possible, so that the panzer and motorized divisions could be refitted and made ready for the Russian campaign. Meanwhile, the Yugoslavs were surrendering by the thousands: 7,000 north of Nis, 40,000 at Uzice, 30,000 around Zvornik, and another 6,000 in Dobo.

Sarajevo fell to the 8th and 14th Panzer Divisions, which converged on the city from the east and west, respectively, on April 15. The Yugoslavian 2nd Army, which headquartered in the city, formally capitulated that same day. Meanwhile, representatives of the Yugoslav government approached General von Kleist late on the evening of April 14, and asked for an immediate cease-fire. When this request was relayed to OKH, it designed Baron von Weichs as its negotiator, although, in reality, there was little to negotiate, since the Germans were demanding an unconditional surrender. The Yugoslavs had little choice except to agree to these terms, and the armistice was concluded in Belgrade on April 17. The cease-fire went into effect at noon on April 18, just 12 days after the invasion was launched.

No one had really excepted that the Yugoslavian Army would turn back the Germans, but, even so, German losses had been surprisingly light. Its total casualty figure came to only 558 men, including 151 killed, 392 wounded, and 15 missing. Reinhardt's XXXXI Panzer Corps had suffered only one casualty: an officer who was killed by a civilian sniper.

The Germans took hundreds of thousands of prisoners, but only kept 254,000. All Croat, German, Hungarian, and Bulgarian nationals who had been inducted into the Yugoslavian Army were released after a quick screening.

The Western press and political leaders, who had been overly optimistic, were dismayed by the speed with which the Germans overran Yugoslav. They had expected too much from a poor country that was badly led, deeply divided by ethnic hatred, and had an antiquated military system.

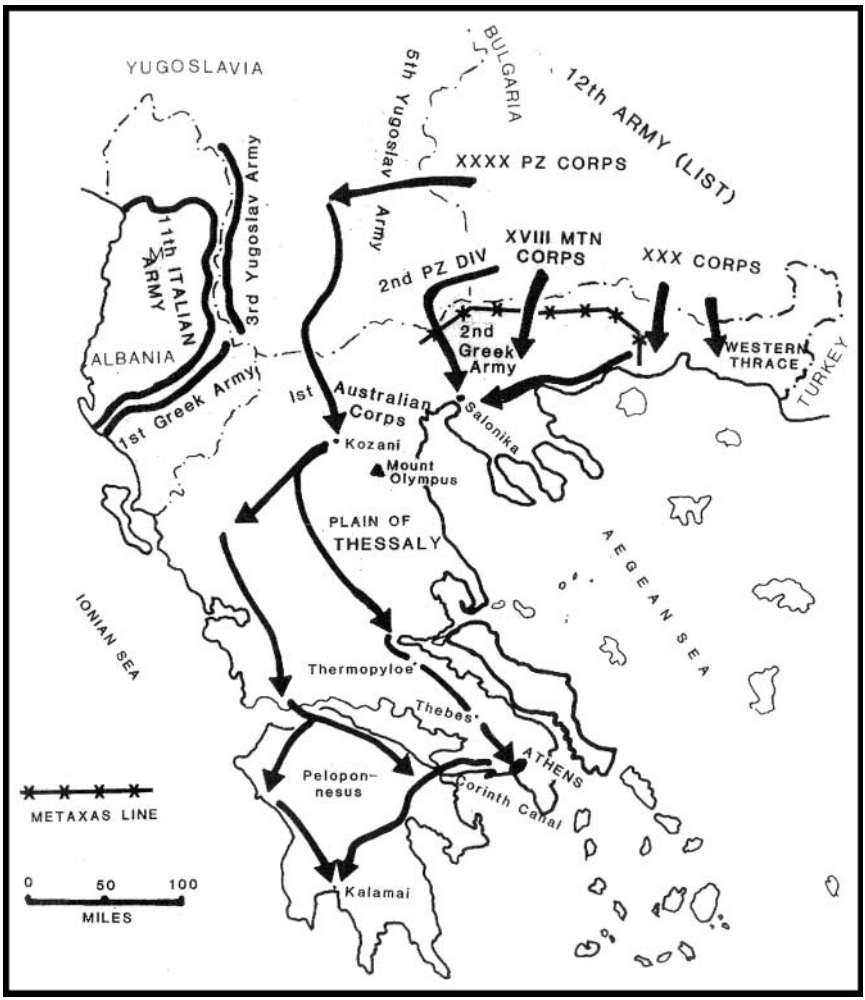
THE FALL OF GREECE

The rapid disintegration of the Yugoslavian Army also doomed Greece to conquest.

Athens pinned its hopes of halting the Germans on the Metalax Line, a series of pillboxes and fortified positions in the steep Rhodope Mountains, extending along the Greco-Bulgarian frontier for 125 miles. Unfortunately, it was immediately outflanked by Georg Stumme's XXXX Panzer Corps, which pushed through the mountains of southern Yugoslavia on April 6, and, after some heavy fighting on the first day of the invasion, brushed aside elements of the Yugoslav 5th Army and captured Skoplje and Veles, 60 miles from Bulgaria, on April 7. This quick thrust severed the rail line between Belgrade and Salonika. Then, while Stumme pushed westward, into the rear of the 1st Greek Army and around the left flank of Force W, the 2nd Panzer Division of Franz Boehme's XVIII Mountain Corps made a shorter (inner) flanking movement through southern Yugoslavia, and outflanked the Metaxas Line to the west (see Figure 26.2). It encountered little resistance in Yugoslavia, and, on April 8, pushed through the mountains and overran the Greek 19th Motorized Infantry Division south of Lake Doiran. The Metaxas Line was turned, the 2nd Greek Army had no more reserves, and its other divisions were pinned down by the rest of the XVIII Mountain Corps, which broke through the strong but thin line on April 7 and 8. Salonika, the second most populous Greek city, fell to Lieutenant General Rudolf Veiel's 2nd Panzer Division without a struggle on the morning of April 9, and Greek resistance east of the Vardar River collapsed. At the same time, the XXX Corps overran lightly defended Thrace, and the Greek 2nd Army surrendered unconditionally the same day. The Germans captured approximately 70,000 Greek prisoners, disarmed them, and sent them home.

Also on April 9, XXXX Panzer Corps took the Monastir Gap in southern Yugoslavia—the traditional invasion route into Greece—and effectively outflanked the Vermion Mountains barrier and Force W. List was now in a position to drive a wedge between the British and

Figure 26.2
The Greek Campaign



the Greek 1st Army and bring the campaign to a rapid conclusion. Realizing this, the marshal rapidly pressed his advantage. The XXXX Panzer Corps, led by the SS regiment, first clashed with the British at 11 A.M. the next morning. The speed with which the 1st SS moved surprised the British command, which gave orders for an immediate evacuation of the Vermion Mountain position. Sepp Dietrich's troops quickly set out in pursuit and captured Vevi on April 11, but they were stopped that afternoon by the Australians, who had set up on the

heights that dominated a road pass that was south of the town. The SS tried to find a way to outflank this position the next day but failed. At dusk, they launched a frontal attack and broke through after heavy fighting. The British forces then continued their retreat.

On April 13, General Stumme ordered the 1st SS Motorized Regiment to drive west to Kastoria to cut off the withdrawal of the 1st Greek Army, while the 9th Panzer Division pursued the more mobile British as they fell back toward Kozani, in the hopes of cutting them off. It was unsuccessful, largely due to the fact that it was almost out of ammunition, but it did force the British rearguard to abandon 32 tanks and anti-tank guns and a number of trucks. That evening, the 9th Panzer established a bridgehead across the Aliakmon River, just north of the Plain of Thessaly. Here the British rearguards made a stand in the strong mountainous positions south of the river and held the panzer division in check for three days.

Meanwhile, the rest of the XXXX Panzer Corps, spearheaded by the 1st SS Motorized Regiment, barreled into the rear of the 1st Greek Army. At this point, Field Marshal Aleksandro Papagos, the commander-in chief of the Greek Army, finally approved the withdrawal from Albania, but it was too late. On April 20, following a fierce battle, the SS men captured the 5,000-foot-high Metsovon Pass in the Pindus Mountains and completed the encirclement of the Greek 1st Army. Realizing that his situation was hopeless, Lieutenant General Georgias Tsolakoglu, the Greek commander, offered to surrender his army.[10]

The negotiations were brief and, on the strict orders of Adolf Hitler, were kept secret from the Italians. In recognition of their valor, Field Marshal List gave the defeated Greeks honorable terms and allowed their soldiers to go home after their units were demobilized. Officers were permitted to keep their side arms. Mussolini, however, was angry over this agreement and, for once in his life, bluntly told Hitler so. The Greeks must surrender to the Italians, too, he said, or he would continue fighting. Italy had lost 63,000 dead in her war with the Greeks, but still had 500,000 men in the field, and it was obvious that Mussolini meant what he said. Reluctantly, Hitler backed down and renounced List's terms. Much to the disgust of the field marshal and the Germans—even Ribbentrop disapproved—the Greeks were forced to sign a new surrender agreement, which included the Italians, on April 23.

For the British, the campaign became a series of difficult retreats—long, forced marches through snow, bitter cold, and icy winds, until the days ran together in the minds of the physically and mentally exhausted men. They retreated across the Thessalian Plain, where they were subjected to continuous daylight attack from the VIII Air Corps. Led by Major General Gustav Fehn, the 5th Panzer Division finally debouched on the Plain of Thessaly on April 19 and set out after

Wilson. Realizing that the end was near, Alexander Koryzis, the Greek president, committed suicide.

The decision to evacuate was made on April 21 and began three days later. Dubbed Operation Demon, it was a miniaturized Dunkirk, was just as improvised, and was almost as successful. Ports were used from as far north as Athens and Piraeus to fishing villages on the southern tip of the Peloponnesus. Most of the ships shuttled between the mainland and Crete, dropping off soldiers and heading back to Greece for another load. Some of the heavier ships, such as cruisers, carried their evacuees to Egypt.

The Luftwaffe, which lacked forward bases and was hampered by logistical problems (a result of the poor road conditions in the Balkans), was unable to halt the evacuation. As was the case at Dunkirk, however, it did hamper it. Twenty-six British vessels were sunk during Operation Demon (excluding fishing vessels) and several others were severely damaged.

The British rearguard made a last stand at Thermopylae on April 22, providing cover for the evacuation. It held off the 5th Panzer Division for two days but finally had to abandon the pass during the night of April 24–25. The difficult terrain, coupled with the poor road system and copious demolitions, allowed it to make good its escape. The mountainous roads had taken a major toll on the 12th Army. Only two weeks after the invasion began, more than one-third of List's motor vehicles were deadlined, mainly due to ruined tires. Wear and tear on tanks was also a serious problem.

List tried to cut off the British rearguards via airborne attack on the morning of April 26, when 270 Ju-52s dropped two reinforced battalions of the 2nd Parachute Regiment on the Isthmus of Corinth. The Anglo-Greek rearguard (2,300 men) was cut off and eventually captured, and the pursuit continued with little delay, but almost all of the British forces had already crossed the Isthmus, and many of them had already been evacuated. Had this operation been conducted a few days before, the B.E.F. might well have suffered disastrous losses. As events transpired, however, the Corinth drop cost the 2nd Parachute Regiment 63 men killed, 158 wounded, and 16 missing.[11]

Now the end in Greece came rapidly. On the morning of April 27, Athens fell to the motorcycle battalion of the 2nd Panzer Division. The 5th Panzer Division roared across the Corinth Canal and overran the Peloponnesus, capturing several isolated British groups that had not been able to reach their evacuation ports on time. In all, 8,000 British and Yugoslav troops were captured in this manner, and several thousand Italian prisoners were liberated. The 5th Panzer reached the southern coast of the Peloponnesus on April 29, and hostilities on the mainland ended the following day.

In all, the Germans lost 1,100 killed and 4,000 wounded or missing during the conquest of Greece. They took at least 270,000 Greek and 90,000 Yugoslavian prisoners in the Greek campaign.[12] The Royal Navy managed to evacuate 43,000 of the 58,000 men the B.E.F. committed to the mainland. Actual British casualties were somewhat higher, however, because hundreds of wounded were evacuated. Most of the British losses were prisoners of war, captured after the 5th Panzer broke into the Peloponnesus, at the very end of the campaign; many of the rest of their casualties occurred aboard evacuation ships that were sunk by the Luftwaffe.

Just as at Dunkirk, equipment losses by British forces were much heavier than personnel losses. The B.E.F. left behind some 8,000 trucks, hundreds of tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery pieces, and 209 wrecked airplanes in Greece, as well as thousands of rifles, radios, and other valuable items of military equipment. In fact, due to equipment shortages of every kind, the units that escaped were only marginally battleworthy, as we shall see.

Forming an objective conclusion concerning the relationship between the Balkans campaign and the invasion of the Soviet Union is not easy; forming a definitive one is impossible.

Many Western historians have averred that the Balkans campaign caused Hitler to postpone the start of Operation Barbarossa from May 15 to June 22: a five-week delay that proved fatal to the German Army, which was caught in the Russian winter and almost destroyed as a result. The delay caused by the invasions of Greece and Yugoslavia, these historians claim, saved Moscow and the Soviet Union and eventually led to the destruction of Nazi Germany.

Whatever the true is, it is not as simple as that. First of all, the spring rains in eastern Poland and the western sections of European Russia came late in 1941 and were much heavier than usual. Many of the Polish-Russian river valleys (including the Bug) were still flooded as late as June 1; therefore, the invasion of the Soviet Union could not have begun until after that. At the most, the Balkans campaign cost Hitler three weeks—not five or six, as some historians argue.

The truth is less simple to ascertain beyond this, because even three more weeks of good campaign weather might have been enough to allow Army Group Center to capture Moscow toward the end of 1941. The Balkans campaign was a contributing factor in Hitler's failure in Russia in 1941, but it certainly not *the* major factor. One must consider that the German armies in Russia were paralyzed for several weeks after the campaign began because of a dispute between Hitler and OKH over strategic priorities. In addition, Hitler's insistence on driving for Leningrad and capturing the Ukraine before he permitted a late season drive on Moscow also costs the Wehrmacht irreplaceable time. The

delay caused by the Balkans campaign was a factor in the subsequent disaster in front of Moscow, but, when considered in light of these other unnecessary delays, the three weeks lost in the Balkans seem to be of much less significance.

On the other hand, the Balkans campaign undoubtedly resulted in another disastrous Allied defeat. Hitler secured by military force what he had not been able to secure by diplomatic means: his supply of oil, chromium, and other vital raw materials. In addition, the decision to strip Wavell's forces in Libya of its best units unquestionably cost the Allies total victory in North Africa. Finally, the equipment losses the Allied forces suffered in Greece were a major cause for their defeat in Crete, as we shall see in our next chapter.

NOTES

1. Koch, ''Genesis,'' p. 319; *DGFP*, vol. 11, document no. 379.
2. Koch, ''Genesis,'' p. 319.
3. Charles Cruickshank, *Greece, 1940–1941* (1976), p. 124 (hereafter cited as Cruickshank).
4. Ibid., p. 95; *DGFP*, XI, pp. 1216–217, 1236–237.
5. Irving, *Hitler's War*, p. 237; *DGFP*, XII, pp. 291–94.
6. United States Department of the Army, ''The German Campaigns in the Balkans (Spring, 1941),'' United States Department of the Army, Pamphlet 20–260 (1953), p. 22 (hereafter cited as DA PAM 20-260).
7. Baldwin, *Critical Years*, pp. 270–71, citing Ruth Mitchell, *The Serbs Choose War* (1941), p. 6.
8. DA PAM 20-260, p. 60.
9. Ibid., p. 65.
10. Aleksandro Papagos (born 1883) was commissioned second lieutenant in the Greek cavalry in 1906. He was a strong royalist throughout his life. In the 1930s, he served as inspector of cavalry, commander of the I Corps, minister of war, and chief of the General Staff before being named commander-in-chief of the army in 1940. After he surrendered in 1941, he was in prisoner-of-war camps until he was liberated in 1945. In 1949, he was named commander-in-chief of the Greek armed forces. He became prime minister in 1952 and died in office on October 4, 1955.

Georgios Tsolakoglu also became a prime minister of Greece—but in a collaborationist government. He took office in 1941 but was replaced in 1942. He was tried as a war criminal and was sentenced to death in 1948, but he died in prison before the sentence could be carried out.

11. Karl Gundelack, ''The Battle for Crete, 1941'' in *Decisive Battles of World War II: The German View*, H. A. Jacobsen and J. Rowher, eds. (1965), p. 102 (hereafter cited as Gundelack).
12. DA PAM 20-260, p. 112.

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CHAPTER XXVII
THE INVASION OF CRETE

Crete, the largest island in the Aegean Sea, is 186 miles long (east to west) and 7 to 35 miles wide (north to south). It was not (and is not) a prosperous place. Most of the land was in rugged mountains, too barren to offer much fodder for animals or cover for military operations. There was not a single mile of railroad track on the island, and only one narrow, paved road existed in 1941. It ran approximately 160 miles along Crete's northern coast. Only one rocky dirt road to the village of Timbakion connected the paved road in the north with the southern coast. The other secondary roads deteriorated into paths or trails as they ascended into the foothills of the mountains, which reached their peaks near the southern face of the island. The mountains reached elevations of up to 10,000 feet and were often snow covered. Many of them ended in cliffs on the southern coast, as they fell into a sheer drop into the sea.

Churchill wanted Crete turned into a second Scapa Flow and said so on October 28, 1940, although Wavell, who was chronically short of troops, could not supply the men. He still had not furnished Crete with much of a garrison in April 1941. A pro-Axis government under Rashid Ali al-Gelani had seized power in Iraq, Rommel was running wild in the Western Desert, General Sir Alan G. Cunningham was fully engaged in crushing Mussolini's forces in Italian East Africa,[1] and the B.E.F. was being mauled in Greece with a speed the British had not anticipated. As a result, Wavell had almost nothing available for Crete, and he was forced to garrison the island with the men being evacuated from Greece, instead of with fresh, well-equipped troops.

As Operation Demon neared its conclusion, the defensive situation on Crete was totally inadequate. It lacked anti-aircraft and coastal defense batteries, had little transport, no telephone system, bad communications, inadequately prepared and equipped airfields, and a totally insufficient number of airplanes; in fact, there was little in the way of military

equipment and hardware that the garrison of Crete did have in adequate amounts.

It is not clear whether the airborne invasion of Crete was the brainchild of Loehr or Student, but Student was certainly an early proponent of it. (At last recovered from the wounds he had suffered in Rotterdam, he was now the commander of the XI Air Corps—the German parachute corps. Loehr still commanded the 4th Air Fleet.) Furthermore, he knew how to manipulate Goering, who soon became an enthusiastic supporter of the operation. On April 16 and 20, the Reichsmarschall attended Fuerher conferences and tried to convert a reluctant Hitler to the idea. Finally, Hitler asked to see General Student on April 21.

The fateful conference began at 3 P.M. Hitler started by saying that he did not think that the operation was practical. Student assured him that it was not only practical, but certain. After considerable discussion, he promised him that it would not interfere with Barbarossa in the slightest. Finally, Hitler asked him why he preferred the seizure of Crete over Malta. (Field Marshal Keitel had repeatedly called for a parachute invasion of that island and, according to Student, Jodl also favored the capture of Malta over Crete.) The slow-speaking Student pointed out that Crete would be an easier objective to seize. Malta, he said, was too small, and the British could easily transfer their reserves from one point to another. Crete, with its long northern coast, was a different matter.

It was obvious that Hitler was at last becoming interested. ''And the next step?'' he asked.

''Cyprus!'' Student answered, with complete self-assurance. ''From there to the Suez, through the back door.''

Goering, learning from Jodl, again pointed out that the airfields on Crete posed a constant threat to the Ploesti oilfields. This remark hit the target. Hitler rose, walked over to his map table, and asked Student how much time he would need for the operation. Three days, the paratrooper replied.

''That's impossible!'' cried Hitler. He then gave Student five days, and warned him that he would have to move with great speed.

''Mein Fuehrer, do your words mean that you approve of the attack upon Crete?'' Student asked.

''I don't know,'' Hitler said, bending over the map table. ''I'll think it over.''[2]

Four days later, however, Hitler issued Fuehrer Directive 28, ordering the seizure of Crete. It specified that only Luftwaffe units would be involved, that it should start no later than the middle of May, and had to be completed by May 25. Hitler assigned it the codename Operation Mercury.

As early as April 18, as a result of ULTRA intercepts, Churchill first informed Wavell that an airborne attack against Crete could be expected.[3] On April 30, Wavell personally inspected the island and found its defenses in such poor condition that he replaced the island commander, British Marine Major General Eric C. Weston, with Major General Bernard C. Freyberg, the commander of the 2nd New Zealand Division. He became the seventh commander of the island since November. Freyberg was a tough and able warrior who had been a brigade commander in the last years of the Great War, even though he was still in his 20s. Despite the fact he was English, he had been selected to command the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force (also known as the 2nd Division) in 1939. He immediately conducted an inspection of Crete and found, among other things, that his total air force consisted of six Hurricanes and 17 obsolete airplanes.[4] In addition, his Greek forces were largely without weapons, were undisciplined and disrespectful of authority, and showed every sign of broken morale. Those that had rifles only had an average of 20 rounds per man. The next day, he reported that he would not be able to hold the island unless he received massive amounts of equipment and strong reinforcements, especially artillery, airplanes, and naval reinforcements. Failing that, he declared, the question of holding Crete should be reconsidered.

Wavell, however, could do little to help him. With Rommel on the rampage in the desert, he had no air units to spare, could only furnish the garrison with 16 light and six infantry support tanks and could not even maintain current levels of supply. At first, it proved possible to bring in and unload 700 tons of supplies a day at Suda Bay; soon, however, the Luftwaffe was pounding the port, and the volume of supplies unloaded at Suda Bay fell to 100 tons per day. The garrison needed 20,000 to 30,000 tons per month.[5]

On May 3, Freyberg divided the island into four major sectors, each with at least one airfield and harbor. The Heraklion (Iraklion) sector was the responsibility of Brigadier Brian H. Chappel; the Rethimnon sector was held by Australian Brigadier G. A. Vasey; the Suda Bay-Canea sector was the responsibility of a composite force under Major General Weston; and the Maleme Sector was held by the 2nd New Zealand Division, temporarily under the command of Brigadier Edward Puttick. In all, Chappel had 8,024 men; Vasey, 6,730; Weston, 14,822; and Puttick, 11,859. Freyberg's total strength (including a small reserve under his personal command) totaled 42,640 men, including 10,258 Greeks. ''The fighting value of the Greeks was not very high,'' Gundelach observed later, ''they were demoralized, disorganized, and poorly equipped.''[6] Freyberg used them to defend positions of secondary importance only.

Freyberg left the disposition of troops to each sector commander, but with one condition: he wanted the airfields to be defended during an

attack by at least one-third of the troops allocated to each sector, with the rest available to overrun any threat to the landing strips. ''You must deny the airfields to the enemy at all costs!'' he told his deputies.[7]

Freyberg did as well as anyone could expect in preparing Crete for the attack. By the middle of the month, he was cautiously optimistic that the island could be held.

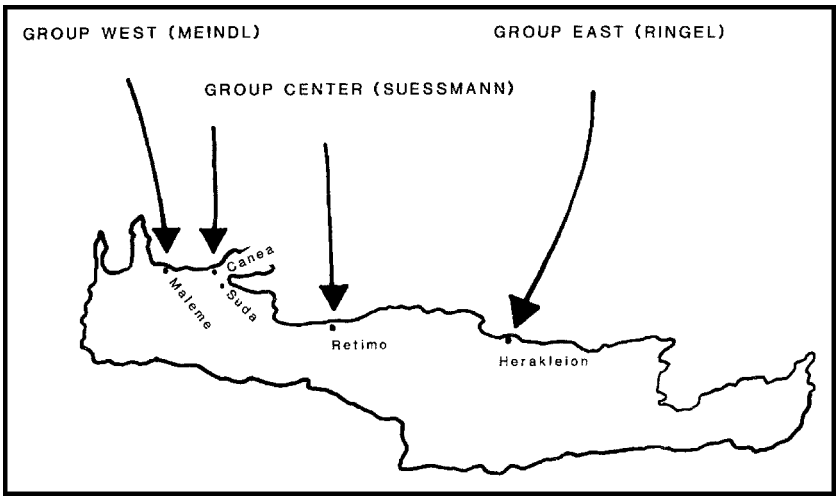
Meanwhile, back in Greece, Colonel General Alexander Loehr was feverishly preparing for the Battle of Crete. As commander of the 4th Air Fleet, he controlled the XI Air Corps (Student) and the VIII Air Corps (von Richthofen). For the Cretan campaign, Student controlled the Assault Regiment (three parachute battalions and one gliderborne battalion); the 7th Air Division (three parachute regiments plus divisional units and two regiments of the 5th Mountain Division); a regiment of the 6th Mountain Division; a panzer battalion and a motorcycle battalion (both from the 5th Panzer Division); and a few smaller detachments. In all, he had 13,000 men. In addition, the rest of the 6th Mountain Division (9,000 men) was on call in air fleet reserve. Some 5,000 of the men of the 5th Mountain Division were slated to be landed by sea, along with 2,000 paratroops. Student also had 10 wings of Ju-52s (502 airplanes), assembled to transport parachute and air landing troops, as well as 85 gliders. Baron von Richthofen had 650 airplanes at his disposal, including 280 bombers, 150 Stuka dive-bombers, 90 twin-engine fighters, 90 single-engine fighters, and 40 reconnaissance aircraft.

General Student planned to put down as many troops by parachute and glider as rapidly as possible. The final plan called for an airborne assault against the three airfields (Maleme, Retimo, and Heraklion). A strong force would also land at Canea, where the Allied reserves were believed to be, to keep them from being committed elsewhere. The attack would come in two waves: the western wave (against Maleme and Canea) would be dropped in the morning, and the eastern wave (against Retimo and Heraklion) would jump in the afternoon.[8] Figure 27.1 shows the final plan. D-Day was set for May 17. Because of logistical problems, however, it had to be postponed until May 20.

Meanwhile, Richthofen's forces had already ''softened up'' the island. On May 9, the remnants of the Royal Air Force units from the Greek campaign had to be sent back to Egypt, to save them from destruction. The last Allied airplanes left on May 19, the day before the invasion. It was now too late to crater the airfields and make them useless for the Germans.

Admiral Canaris personally took charge of the military intelligence phase of the operation. As was not unusual, he made a several serious mistakes. His estimate of the number of British troops on the island was only one-third of the actual total. He assured Student and the

Figure 27.1
The Conquest of Crete



other planners that they could expect little resistance on the island, and his spies informed him that the Cretans would probably welcome the paratroopers with open arms. In fact, the Cretans actively supported the British and even killed wounded German paratroopers with axes and pitchforks. The aerial reconnaissance reports were also generally wrong. Many decoy anti-aircraft sites, armed with wooden guns, were reported as the real sites, while the real positions, which were well camouflaged, went undetected. Finally, Canaris stated that the British ''Tommies'' were ''demoralized'' and ''wouldn't show much fight.''[9] These mistakes would cause XI Air Corps hundreds of casualties on May 20.

On D-Day, May 20, XI Air Corps divided into three groups. Group West, led by Major General Eugen Meindl, the commander of the elite Assault Regiment, was charged with the task of seizing the Maleme Airfield in the first wave and holding it for subsequent landings. Group Center, under the direction of Lieutenant General Wilhelm Suessmann, was supposed to seize Canae and the village of Suda in the first wave to dislocate the defense, force Freyberg to commit his reserves too quickly and in the wrong place, and put the main Allied harbor out of operation. The rest of Group Center was to drop in the second wave and seize Retimo at 3:15 P.M. Finally, Group East, a second-wave operation, was to seize the town and airfield of Heraklion by parachute drops and then hold the airfield open for the subsequent

landing of the mountain troops. Since the group commander, Lieutenant General Julius Ringel, was not jump qualified, the airborne spearhead was led by Colonel Bruno Braeuer, the commander of the 1st Parachute Regiment.

The first phase of the operation went like clockwork. Between 7 A.M. and 7:15 A.M., just before the paratroopers jumped, the VIII Air Corps launched a major attack against ground targets, with the objective of pinning down the enemy at and near the landing zones to protect the transports. It was extremely successful: only seven Ju-52s were lost out of the 493 that participated. Even before the gliders were released and the paratroopers dropped, however, everything began to go wrong for the first assault wave.

The glider carrying Wilhelm Suessmann, the tough and able commander of Group Center and the 7th Air Division, crashed en route and everyone aboard was killed. Many of his men were no more lucky. ''Even as they dropped they were within range and the crackle of rifle fire and Bren guns rose to a crescendo,'' Davin wrote later.

> Wildly waving their legs, some already firing their Schmeissers, the parachutists came down, in the terraced vineyards, crashing through the peaceful olive boughs, in the yards of houses, on roofs, in the open fields where the short barley hid them. Many found graves where they found earth. Others, ridding themselves of their harness, crept cautiously in search of comrades, only to meet enemies. . . . [Many landed] in the middle of the defenders and few were to escape. But where they landed out of range . . . there was the chance to collect more weapons and ammunition from the canisters, to organize their sections, to attack. The day had indeed begun.[10]

After the death of General Suessmann, Group Center was commanded by Colonel Richard Heidrich, who also retained command of the 3rd Parachute Regiment. He inherited a disaster. ''The moment we left the planes we were met with extremely heavy small arms fire,'' a company sergeant-major in the II Battalion of the 3rd Parachute Regiment recalled.

> From my aircraft we suffered particularly heavy casualties and only three men reached the ground unhurt. Those who had jumped first, nearer to Galatas, were practically all killed, either in the air or soon after landing. The survivors rallied . . . we became organized, collected equipment, and formed up for an attack up the hill to the north. . . . Approximately 350 men of my battalion survived the initial landing and organizing period.[11]

The Parachute Engineer Battalion, with the 3rd Parachute Machine Gun Company and a platoon of anti-tank guns in support, was put down correctly north of Alikianou. ''They had to free themselves from

their harness and the abundant cactus while under fire from Greek troops and civilians,'' the New Zealand Official History recorded. ''By the time they had done so they found that the Greeks had acquired German weapons.'' Numerous Greek partisans, including women and children, armed themselves with shotguns and resisted fiercely. Many of the parachute engineers' weapons canisters were lost and the battalion was soon surrounded by Australians, Greek soldiers, and Greek partisans, and suffered heavy casualties. At 2 P.M., when it was low in ammunition, seven Ju-52 transports dropped it arms and ammunition, but all of the canisters landed behind Greek lines. The engineers had to struggle just to survive.[12]

The experience of Major Ludwig Heilmann's III Battalion, 3rd Parachute Regiment, was fairly typical. III/FJR 3's mission was to seize the village of Galatas, on the road to Canea. Heilmann jumped with his 9th Company, which was dropped in the wrong place and landed in the middle of a concentration of Greeks and New Zealanders. Only by violent effort, relying mainly on machine pistols and grenades, were they able to seize one of the heights southeast of Galatas. The company had lost half of its men in the process.

By midday, Heidrich signaled XI Air Corps Headquarters that the attack on Canea had been discontinued due to heavy losses. By nightfall, the largest group of survivors of Group Center was in and around a place called Prison Valley, under the personal command of Colonel Heidrich. He had fewer than 1,000 unwounded men, and his position was critical. Meanwhile, scattered and isolated groups continued to hold out to the north.

Group West initially did no better than Group Center. The III Battalion of the Assault Regiment came to ground in its assigned drop zone (DZ), south of the Maleme-Platanias Road, a sector that was supposed to be free of enemy forces. Instead, it landed on top of the 21st and 23rd New Zealand Battalions and was quickly slaughtered before it could organize or even recover its weapons containers. All of its officers and 400 of its 600 men were killed, including Major Scherber, the battalion commander. Most of the rest of the Assault Regiment (but not all of it) landed west of the Tavronitis River, in zones generally free of enemy forces, and the 15th Company of Major Braun's IV Battalion seized the bridge over the river, just west of Maleme.

General Meindl jumped at 7:30 A.M. and landed west of the Tavronitis. Quickly assessing his situation, he found that that forces he had available consisted of the 3rd Company, I Battalion; the 5th, 7th, and 8th Companies of Stentzler's II Battalion; and the 15th Company. The rest of his assault units were unaccounted for. Maleme Airfield was still in enemy hands, and the scattered troops of Major Walter Koch's I Battalion had not taken the vital Point 107, just south of the airfield, as

planned. Almost as soon as he landed, Meindl concluded that his best prospect for victory lay in exploiting Braun's success at the bridge and developing it into an attack that would take Point 107 from the northwest. He reinforced Braun with the 8th Company and ordered Major Stentzler to cross the river south of the bridge with the 5th and 7th Companies and to attack Point 107 from the southwest. Meindl's forces were soon heavily engaged by New Zealanders, Greek troops, and Cretan partisans, and their initial efforts to take Point 107 by frontal assault were unsuccessful. General Meindl was shot in the chest and critically wounded during the attempt.

Meanwhile, between 9 A.M. and 10 A.M., the VIII Air Corps and Ju-52 pilots returned to the mainland from their initial missions. Perhaps because their own operations had been so successful, they had formed optimistic (and erroneous) impressions of how the ground fighting was going. Based on these reports, the second wave was sent in as planned, resulting in further errors and setbacks. The situation on the overcrowded airfields was also deteriorating. It proved impossible to get the Ju-52s ready for a second sortie by 1 P.M., and some airplanes were delayed as long as three and a half hours due to the difficulty of refueling, because airplanes that crash landed or crashed upon landing had to be removed from the runways, and because the clouds of dust on the overtaxed fields were so thick that not even fire-firing equipment helped much. As a result, the Luftwaffe squadrons started in the wrong tactical order. Instead of arriving at their destinations together, the transports arrived haphazardly between 3 P.M. and 6 P.M. Because of their short range, however, the German fighters were only able to stay over the combat zone until 4:15 P.M. As a result, a major part of the second wave was dropped without fighter protection and suffered fairly heavy losses. Also, instead of dropping all of the paratroopers at once, as originally planned, they dropped them in small units at varying times—a further advantage for the defenders.

The ill-fated second wave included the I and III Battalions of FJR 2, which landed east of Retimo, and Colonel Braeuer's Group East (the 1st Parachute Regiment and most of the II Battalion of the 2nd). By nightfall, the survivors of these units were occupying positions in the hills and mountains, tending their wounded, and wondering whether they would ever again see the lights of home.

The defense of the airfield at Maleme was the responsibility of 49-year-old Brigadier Janies Hargest, the short, plump commander of the 5th New Zealand Brigade.[13] He had assigned the defense of the airfield and Hill 107 to Lieutenant Colonel Andrew's 22nd Battalion and echeloned the 23rd and 21st Battalions east of the field. He kept the 28th (Maori) Battalion in reserve in the village of Platanias, where he set up his own headquarters.

Andrew held the airfield and Hill 107 throughout May 20, but with a growing sense of isolation. The telephone lines between his battalion headquarters and his companies had been cut by the German bombing. (Because of the lack of time, the nature of the terrain, and the lack of tools, it had been impossible to bury them.) The battalion had lost most of its communications equipment in Greece and only had one wireless set, and it worked only intermittently. At 3:30 P.M., Andrew sent a message to brigade headquarters, indicating his growing anxiety concerning his lack of contact with most of his companies. He had also been promised reinforcements; in fact, the entire 23rd Battalion was supposed to come to his aid if he were heavily attacked. Six companies of German assault troops were now putting pressure on his perimeter, and he wanted to know where his reinforcements were.

At 5 P.M., Andrew again asked Brigadier Hargest for the promised reinforcements. Shortly afterward, Hargest replied that the 23rd was too heavily engaged against the paratroopers in its own sector to aid the 22nd. At that point, Andrew committed his last reserves, the 14th Platoon and his two I tanks, and ordered them to attack the Tavronitis Bridge. One of the tanks soon withdrew because its gun would not work. The second bellied down in the rough river bed and jammed its turret, whereupon it was abandoned by its crew. Meanwhile, the 14th Platoon met a withering fire; when it at last retreated, it had only 9 or 10 men left, and most of those were wounded.

At 6 P.M., Andrew again contacted Hargest and told him that the counterattack had failed. He said that he had no further resources and could only contact two of his five companies. Without reinforcements, he said, he would have to withdraw.

''If you must, you must,'' Hargest replied.[14]

Apparently Hargest thought that Andrew only intended to withdraw his forward elements to a ridge near the airfield. He did not seem to grasp the full implications of Andrew's proposed move. Later he did send him two companies, but one of them got lost in the darkness. Meanwhile, Braun's forces[15] pushed the 22nd's perimeter back once again, and by nightfall the Germans held the northern (seaward) side of the airfield, but the New Zealanders continued to cling to the southern end. Finally, between 9 P.M. and 9:30 P.M., Andrew again spoke to Hargest. By now his radio was so weak that it was the last message he would be able to send, and he told the brigadier that he was withdrawing. Hargest accepted this dispatch, without thinking that it called for any action on his part.

It was the turning point of the battle.

During the night of May 20–21, in his headquarters in Athens, General Student expected to receive word that a heavy attack had been launched against the remnants of the Assault Regiment near Maleme.

When it did not materialize, he decided to concentrate all of his efforts in this sector. This decision tipped the scales of the battle in favor of the Germans. He also named the hard-charging Colonel Hermann Bernard Ramcke commander of Group West. Ramcke, a Freikorps veteran who had undergone the standard, vigorous Luftwaffe jump school course at the age of 51, parachuted into the Maleme sector early on the morning of May 21, and immediately began to try to push back the Allies, who still had the airfield under intense infantry and artillery fire.

General Freyberg still did not know that the Maleme airfield had been lost. Had he known it, he undoubtedly would have done everything possible to recapture it. But misunderstandings and communications failures paralyzed the New Zealand command. Meanwhile, several Ju-52s crash landed on the beach at Maleme, bringing in arms and ammunition that the Assault Regiment desperately needed. Beginning at 4 P.M., elements of a mountain battalion were landed on the airfield at Maleme, despite the fact that it was under continuous artillery and machine gun fire. Several Ju-52s were destroyed in the process, but Ramcke now had the resources to launch a major attack. By 5 P.M., the village of Maleme was in German hands and the German hold on the airfield had been consolidated. By nightfall, the I and II Battalions of the 100th Mountain Infantry Regiment had landed on the damaged airfield.

''Maleme was like the gate of hell,'' General Ringel recalled. Eighty Ju-52s—every third transport to land—was destroyed, and the single runway was cleared by pushing the damaged airplanes off with a captured British tank, which was used like a bulldozer. Bekker described the sides of the airfield as a ''giant aircraft cemetery.''[16] In all, 150 Ju-52s would be lost in the Battle of Crete. The cost was high, but Maleme was nevertheless secure by the next day, when Ringel took command of Group West, and three more battalions of his 5th Mountain Division landed. The next step in the land battle was to extend the bridgehead, drive the enemy out of his naval strongpoint at Suda Bay (where fast convoys were still bringing in supplies at night), and make contact with Group Center.

In the meantime, the air-sea phase of the battle of Crete began. The British Mediterranean Fleet still barred the sea lanes to the island and prevented the Germans from bringing more reinforcements, tanks, and heavy weapons to the island. On May 22, with the tide of the land battle at last turning in Germany's favor, Richthofen's VIII Air Corps finally turned its full attention to the British warships.

The first skirmish had taken place the day before, when an Italian naval flotilla (made up mostly of Greek fishing vessels) carrying heavy weapons to Crete was attacked and dispersed by a British task force,

which sank 10 Italian vessels. Richthofen promptly committed his corps reserve (which he had withheld for just such an eventually), and it sank the British destroyer *Juno* and damaged the cruiser *Ajax*. On the 22nd, however, the battle became general. At 5:30 A.M., several Stukas dived from 12,000 feet and bombed the cruisers *Gloucester* and *Fiji*, damaging but not sinking them. These ships then took positions further west, nearer Cunningham's main fleet (Task Forces A, B, and D); meanwhile, Rear Admiral Edward L. S. King's Task Force C patrolled the sea north of Crete with four cruisers and three destroyers. They located and chased a German flotilla that was trying to ship heavy weapons to Crete, but, just before King could catch the small German vessels, his task force was attacked by Richthofen's Ju-88s and Do-17s. Two of the cruiser *Naiad*'s gun turrets were knocked out and her side was torn open, but her bulkheads held and she limped off at half speed. The cruiser *Carlisle* suffered a direct hit and her captain was killed, but she also remained afloat.

That afternoon, Richthofen's pilots seriously damaged the battleship *Warspite* with a direct hit and sank the destroyer *Greyhound.* King ordered two destroyers to pick up survivors and recalled the cruisers *Gloucester* and *Fiji* from the west, to provide anti-aircraft covering fire for the destroyers. When he gave this order, he did not realize that they had expended virtually all of their anti-aircraft ammunition that morning. When he learned the true situation, he promptly reversed himself, but it was too late: a dozen or more Stukas and Ju-88s spotted the *Gloucester* and pounded her. Soon she was on fire and her damage control teams were unable to extinguish the blazes. At 4 P.M., the fires reached her fuel tanks or a magazine, and she was shaken by an internal explosion and sank. Admiral King made the difficult decision to leave the crew to its fate, because any ship attempting to rescue it would itself fall victim to the Luftwaffe. That night, about 500 members of the *Gloucester*'s crew were rescued by the small German flotilla and by Luftwaffe sea rescue aircraft.

Meanwhile the *Fiji*, escorted by destroyers, attempted to escape to Alexandria. She was spotted by a lone Me-109, carrying a single 500-pound bomb. As luck would have it, the bomb struck the *Fiji* in the side, below the water line, and exploded, fracturing the hull. It was listing heavily when a second Me-109 (summoned by the first) finished it off with a direct hit. The *Fiji* capsized at 7:15 P.M.

During the night of May 22–23, the destroyers *Kashmir* and *Kelly* shelled the Maleme airfield. When dawn broke, they were still off the northern shore of Crete, in position to block any Axis seaborne landing attempts. The navy did not come that day, but 24 Stukas from I/StG 2 did. Both destroyers were smashed and soon sank under the weight of direct hits. This was enough for Admiral Cunningham, who signaled London that the Royal Navy would have to withdraw: the losses were

becoming more than the Mediterranean Fleet could afford. Churchill, however, was not yet ready to accept defeat, so he ordered the fleet to continue daylight operations north of Crete, no matter what the cost. He also instructed Sir Andrew to reinforce and resupply Freyberg's garrison, which was still trying to check the Germans.

May 21 and 22 were desperate days for Groups Center and East. Transport planes succeeded in bringing ammunition to Heidrich's forces near Prison Valley, but yet another attempt to seize the high ground around Galatas was beaten back. The German forces in the Retimo area, on the other hand, were totally on the defensive and held their positions against Greek and Australian attacks only with difficulty. To the east, Colonel Braeuer attempted to take the Heraklion airfield but without success. The attack was hopeless without heavy weapons.

On May 23, General Ringel was at last able to launch a general offensive, and the mountain troops and paratroopers pushed back the British, Greeks, and New Zealanders. That evening, they linked up with Group Center west of Canea. The following day, however, Ringel was halted before the strongly fortified Allied position at Galatas. Here, on the plateau west of Canea, Freyberg concentrated all of his available forces for the final defense of Suda Bay, and it was here that the final battle for Crete was fought.

On May 25, the German situation at Maleme was still far from satisfactory. Airplanes were constantly crashing while attempting to land on the relatively small and damaged airfield, and the naturally confined space had been made narrower still because of wreckage. Even so, 4th Air Fleet had little choice but to continue landing planes there, at least until another airfield could be secured or Cunningham's warships could be forced to withdrawn. By the end of the day, two more battalions had off-loaded at Maleme and were rushing toward the front.

The British defense took a double blow on May 26, when the aircraft carrier *Formidable* took two direct hits from German bombs off the coast of Crete, while the destroyer *Nubian* lost her stern. Meanwhile, supported by a concentrated attack from VIII Air Corps, General Ringel penetrated Freyberg's lines west of Canea. Freyberg was now convinced that the loss of Crete was only a matter of time. That morning he signaled Wavell, stated that his men were at the limits of their endurance, and asked for permission to evacuate.

Allied resistance in the vicinity of Canea was definitely broken on May 27. Freyberg ordered preparations for evacuation from the small harbor of Sfakia on the southern coast. The following day, Canea and Suda Bay fell to the Germans, and a tug brought two lighters into Maleme, carrying four panzers for Group West. The Royal Navy had at last abandoned daylight operations in the waters north of Crete. It had prevented the Germans from bringing in reinforcements and supplies

by sea during the critical days of the battle, although its losses had been prohibitively high.

During the night of May 28–29, about 4,000 British troops were evacuated from the northern coast of the island. The British task force, however, was again met by the Luftwaffe, which sank the destroyers *Hereward* and *Imperial*, with about 800 men on board. The cruisers *Ajax*, *Orion*, and *Dido* were also damaged. This action ended Royal Navy operations off northern Crete. All that was left for the defenders to do was to escape to the southern coast. Well covered by two battalions of commandos, which retreated over terrain that was favorable to the defense, most of them did just that.

Because some people feared the loss of further ships, they urged Admiral Cunningham to abandon the ground troops still on Crete to their fate. This the admiral categorically refused to do. ''It takes three years to build a ship. It takes 300 years to build a tradition,'' he declared. The evacuation continued.

On May 29, Ringel relieved Retimo and made contact with Group East near Heraklion. That night, the evacuation of Crete was in full swing. Sfakia, the collecting point for the evacuation, was a small fishing village at the foot of an almost perpendicular rock face, which was more than 300 feet high and negotiable only by one steep goat track. During the day, the men awaiting evacuation had to hide from the Luftwaffe, while the commandos conducted a bitter series of delaying actions in the mountains behind them.

The evacuation was completed on the night of May 31–June 1. A fleet of British cruisers, destroyers, and merchant ships took off a total of 17,000 men. Half of the British forces had to be taken from open beaches during the few short hours of night—a masterly feat of seamanship. During the evacuation, a Ju-88 sank the anti-aircraft cruiser *Calcutta* 100 miles off the coast of Alexandria. The cruiser P*erth* was damaged, as were three more destroyers.

Crete at been a victory for German arms, but it had been purchased at a heavy cost on both sides. Freyberg's British forces had lost 15,314 men during the battle of Crete (1,742 killed or missing, 1,737 wounded, and 11,835 captured). The Greek military and paramilitary forces had lost 2,600 killed; the rest were captured or dispersed. The Royal Air Force lost 46 airplanes, and the Royal Navy lost 1,828 dead or missing and 183 wounded. On the other side, the Germans lost 6,116 men out of 25,000 engaged—a fourth of the total. Hitler's forces suffered more casualties in Crete than they had during the entire Balkan campaign. The elite XI Air Corps had been decimated, and the aviation component of the Luftwaffe had been severely damaged on the eve of Operation Barbarossa. In all, Goering lost 220 airplanes, with another 64 damaged. The transport branch had been especially badly mauled.

Potentially, the worse strategic damage had been done to Cunningham's Mediterranean Fleet. It had lost three cruisers and six destroyers sunk and three battleships, seven cruisers, four destroyers, and an aircraft carrier damaged. After Crete, the Royal Navy in the eastern Mediterranean had an operational strength of only two battleships, two cruisers, and 13 destroyers, making it numerically inferior to the Italian Navy. Had Mussolini's fleet ventured forth with the support of the Luftwaffe, it would have had a reasonable chance of defeating the dreaded Cunningham and might have even forced the surrender of Malta or established Italian naval dominance in the eastern Mediterranean. The Italian Navy preferred to remain in port, however, and the opportunity passed, never to present itself again.

Crete was a strategic dead end for the Germans. Hitler had at last secured his Ploesti oilfields, and he was not interested in further operations in the Mediterranean theater. Rommel's operations in the desert now became strictly a sideshow; the main event was in Russia, which he invaded the following month.

Immediately after the fall of Canae, Student flew from Athens to Crete, to see what was left of his corps. (Loehr had forbidden him to go to the island prior to this.) One of his battalion commanders, Captain Baron Friedrich-August von der Heydte, noted that, ''He had visibly altered. He seemed much graver, more reserved, and older. The cost of victory had evidently proved too much for him. Some of the battalions had lost all their officers and in several companies there were only a few men left alive.''[17] After the war, General Student said,

> The name of Crete is for me—the man who conquered it—a bitter memory. . . . I made a wrong decision when I suggested this attack, since not only did it mean the loss of so many paratroopers who were my sons, but also the end of the parachute arm, which I created myself.[18]

Crete did sound the death knell of the German parachute corps as an airborne force. On July 17, Hitler told Student that ''the day of the parachutist is over. The parachute arm is a surprise weapon and without the element of surprise there can be no future for airborne operations.'' The German parachute corps survived—indeed, grew—but as a conventional infantry force. The Germans never conducted a large-scale airborne operation again.

NOTES

1. The Duke of Aosta surrendered the last Italian forces in Ethiopia on May 19, 1941.

2. G. C. Kiriakopoulos, *Ten Days to Destiny* (1985; reprint ed., 1986), p. 30 (hereafter cited as Kiriakopoulos); Willi Frischauer, *Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering* (1951), p. 195.

3. Playfair, vol. 2, p. 126; Kiriakopoulos, p. 44.
4. Charles Whiting, *Hunters From the Sky: The German Parachute Corps, 1940–1945* (1974), pp. 49–50 (hereafter cited as Whiting, *Hunter*).
5. Gundelach, ''Crete,'' p. 116.
6. Ibid.
7. Frischauer, *Goering*, p. 190.
8. Bekker, *Luftwaffe War Diaries*, p. 261.
9. Halder Diaries, April 24, 1941.
10. Daniel M. Davin, *Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War, 1939–1945: Crete* (1953), p. 22 (hereafter cited as Davin, *Crete*).
11. Student, *Crete*, p. 55.
12. New Zealand Official History; Kiriakopoulos, p. 30; Student, *Crete*, p. 60; Frischauer, *Goering*, p. 195.
13. Playfair, vol. 2, p. 126.
14. Whiting, *Hunters*, pp. 49–50.
15. Major Braun was killed in action during the Battle of Crete, but at what point is not clear.
16. Davin, *Crete*, p. 42.
17. Gundelach, ''Crete,'' p. 116.
18. Student, *Crete*, p. 90.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SIEGE OF BRITAIN, LATE 1940 TO MAY 1941

Many Western observers mentally segregate the Battle of Britain and the other air operations against the British Isles from the Battle of the Atlantic and the other naval operations against the United Kingdom. This interpretation is, in a sense, proper; however, in the realm of grand strategy (insofar as Nazi Germany had a grand strategy), they were definitely interrelated, even if they were not properly coordinated. Despite the fact that they were entirely different modes of warfare, they had the same objectives: (1) bring Britain to its knees or (2) reduce London's ability to wage war. The German naval forces waged war on three different levels: those of the armed merchant raider, the submarine, and surface raids by capital ships.

The most successful commerce raider was the *Atlantis*, which was commanded by the gallant Captain Berhard Rogge, a straight-laced officer who sent one of his men to prison for stealing a pair of binoculars from a captured British captain. In a 622-day, 102,000-mile cruise, he sank 22 ships (145,697 tons). His ship was sunk by the heavy cruiser *Devonshire* on November 22, 1941. Almost the entire crew was able to escape and were rescued by *U-126* and the supply ship *Python*. A few days later the *Python* was caught by another British cruiser and scuttled to avoid capture. The crews of the *Atlantis* and the *Python* boarded life boats and were at sea for a week before they were picked up by German submarines. When they finally got home, Hitler held a special reception for them in Berlin, promoted Rugge to rear admiral, and decorated him with the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross.

The handful of armed merchant raiders that Germany had were committed to operations in the spring of 1940. For a relative small investment (they represented only a tiny fraction of the German war effort), they caused relatively large disruptions in the British economy;

however, despite the headaches they caused the British Admiralty, they never posed a serious threat to British lifelines, and their effectiveness ended when the use of the convoy system became widespread. By November 1941, the glory days of the armed merchant raider were over, although the last one was not sunk until October 18, 1943.

Part of the German surface fleet also engaged in the dangerous business of surface raiding as well. One of the most successful such operations was directed by Theodor Krancke, the captain of the *Admiral Scheer*. On one four-month raid (ending April 1, 1941), the *Scheer* sank 17 enemy ships totaling 152,000 tons and damaged seven others. In addition, he disrupted British shipping from the North Sea to the Indian Ocean and evaded almost half of the British fleet, which attempted to run him down. He was awarded the Knight's Cross and, on the very day he docked at Kiel, was promoted to rear admiral. Shortly thereafter, he became naval liaison officer to Fuehrer Headquarters.

Meanwhile, at last, the Luftwaffe became interested in attacking shipping. OKM had long maintained that, if it tried, the Air Force alone could sink 300,000 tons of shipping a month and inflict heavy damage on the British harbors. This prediction proved correct, for, in April 1941, the Luftwaffe sank 296,000 tons of shipping, destroyed half of the docks in Liverpool, and put most of the Glasgow shipyards out of action for at least three months.[1] The Siege of Britain was tightening.

In the meantime, Admiral Guenther Luetjens, the commander of the German surface fleet, sailed from Kiel and began a major convoy raid with the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. This was his third attempt to reach the Atlantic, but this time he was successful, and he fell on British shipping lanes with his battleships. He sank five ships in one day and then turned southeast, to attack the route around the bulge of Africa; however, he was under strict orders from Raeder and SKL not to take any risks that might cause the loss of German capital ships. During this cruise, Luetjens intercepted two convoys with battleship escorts, but, in accordance with his take-no-risk orders, he did not attack them. Before the sortie was over, the two battleships had sunk 13 merchant vessels and sent three back to Germany as prizes. The British had lost 115,622 more tons of shipping and the convoy schedules had again been completely disrupted. Luetjens' run had also provided indirect cover for the returning *Scheer*. He then successfully evaded the Royal Navy and made his way to Brest, where he docked on March 23. He was summoned to Berlin in April.

THE SINKING OF THE BISMARCK

For his next mission, Grand Admiral Raeder ordered Gunther Luetjens to conduct a raid into the Atlantic with the heavy cruiser *Prinz*

Eugen and the battleship *Bismarck*. It would be the maiden voyage of the monstrous, 42,000-ton vessel.

Luetjens objected to Raeder's plan. He pointed out that the difference between the endurance of the two ships would prevent them from operating together as a homogeneous force. He wanted to wait until the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* were repaired and refitted and the *Tirpitz*, the sister ship of the *Bismarck*, completed her crew training period, which would mean a delay of about four months. As a combined force, these four ships would be difficult for even the Royal Navy to deal with; otherwise, Germany would be committing her forces piecemeal. Raeder, however, wanted to get them to sea while the Arctic nights were still long enough to provide cover. He felt that heavy ships were needed in the North Atlantic immediately, both to help the U-boats and to divert British naval strength from the Mediterranean, as well as to help the Afrika Korps and to provide indirect aid for the airborne invasion of Crete, which was scheduled for May 20.

Although he had by far the stronger case, and in spite of his own better judgment, Luetjens allowed himself to be persuaded. He remembered how his predecessors, Hermann Boehm and Wilhelm Marschall, had been sacked by the Grand Admiral, who was known to be overly sensitive to criticism, real or imagined. In fact, after leaving Berlin, Luetjens paid a visit to Marschall, a champion of the commander's right of freedom of action on the sea. The retired admiral urged Luetjens not to feel himself too closely bound by the instructions of SKL, the Naval Operations' Staff.

''No, thank you,'' Luetjens said as he rejected Marschall's advice. ''There have already been two Fleet Commanders who have lost their jobs owing to friction with the Naval Staff, and I don't want to be the third. I know what they want, and shall carry out their orders.''[2]

The stage was set for another disaster.

There was another reason for questioning the logic of this operation, which Admiral Luetjens did not use: Was it wise to employ battleships as commerce raiders—a mission for which they were not designed?

There were basically two reasons for doing so. First, Imperial Germany had lost World War I without utilizing her fleet to a faction of its capabilities—a fact that hung over the Naval Staff like a dark cloud during World War II. Admiral Raeder, among others, had strongly disapproved of the timid use of the Kaiser's fleet and was determined that the same mistake would not be committed in this war. Second, the German capital ships had enjoyed a surprising run of success as commerce raiders in the first two years of the war. The *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* had sunk 22 British and Allied merchant vessels during the first two months of 1941, sending 115,622 tons of shipping to the bottom.[3] The heavy cruisers *Scheer* and *Hipper* had also experienced some

success (especially the former). There was no reason not to expect a similar performance from the *Bismarck*, or so the German admirals thought.

Adolf Hitler visited Gotenhafen (now Gydnia, Poland) on May 5, to inspect both the *Tirpitz* and the *Bismarck*, and, like the Fleet Commander, expressed doubts about the advisability of this operation. Now, however, Luetjens strongly supported Raeder's point of view. Had he said what he really thought, it is quite likely that the tragedy of the *Bismarck* would have been avoided. Faced by the united front of his naval experts, however, Hitler decided not to interfere with Raeder's plans. Unlike the case with his army generals, the Fuehrer did not consider his ideas concerning naval warfare to be superior to those of his admirals. Not yet, anyway.

The *Bismarck*, accompanied by the *Prinz Eugen* (under Captain Helmuth Brinkmann) and three destroyer escorts, sailed for the Atlantic on May 18. They steamed out to sea through the Great Belt during the night of May 19–20 and were first spotted by a British agent in the Kattegat on the afternoon of the 20th. On May 21, the small German fleet entered Hellwerden, in the Korsfjord near Bergen, Norway, to refuel. Here they were positively identified by British aerial reconnaissance, and the hunt was on. The Admiralty's first step was to revoke the orders of the battle cruiser *Repulse* and aircraft carrier *Victorious*, which had been scheduled to sail to North Africa the following day, as escort for an important troop convoy to the Middle East.

The Denmark Strait was already blocked by the heavy cruiser *Norfolk*, the flagship of the 1st Cruiser Squadron. The squadron commander ordered the heavy cruiser *Suffolk*, then refueling at Hvalfjord, Iceland, to join him at once. Shortly before 11 P.M. that night, Admiral Sir Charles Tovey, the commander of the Home Fleet, sailed from Scapa Flow aboard the battleship *King George V*, escorted by the *Victorious* and the 2nd Cruiser Squadron, which included four cruisers and seven destroyers. Tovey also ordered the Battle Cruiser Squadron (led by Vice Admiral Lancelot Holland[4]) with the battleships *Hood* and the *Prince of Wales* to patrol the Denmark Strait north of the 62nd parallel. Tovey himself would take charge of covering the seas south of that parallel.

Luetjens, meanwhile, left the fjord during the night of May 21–22, with the *Bismarck* in the lead, sailing north, and dismissed his destroyer escorts at about the latitude of Trondheim. The weather was stormy, so he had decided to launch an immediate breakout attempt. Speed was of the essence. After crossing the Arctic Circle, Luetjens pushed through rains and heavy clouds, near the edge of the ice line. Suddenly, at 7:22 P.M. on May 23, near the northwest coast of Iceland, the British heavy cruiser *Suffolk* appeared out of a thick fog bank, seven

miles from the battleship. Before the Germans could open fire, the *Suffolk* ducked back into the fog, circled back behind the battleship, and began sending radio signals. The *Bismarck*'s electronics specialists reported an ominous development: the British had a new type of tracking radar, and they were already trapped in its net. An hour or so later, the heavy cruiser *Norfolk* appeared out of the fog, and the battleship straddled her with 15-inch gun salvos, but she also escaped into the fog without serious damage.

That night, Luetjens reversed his order of battle and sent the *Prinz Eugen* ahead of the *Bismarck*, so that the battleship could threaten the British cruisers. In the low visibility, this move went unnoticed by the British. Both continued steaming southwest. Early the next morning, as the weather became increasingly clearer, the German lookouts spotted two new opponents: the battle cruisers *Hood* and *Prince of Wales*. The *Hood* was equal to the *Bismarck* in size, speed, and weaponry, but she was more than 20 years older and her deck armor was weak, so she was vulnerable to plunging fire. The *Prince of Wales* was a significantly better and more modern warship; however, its crew lacked experience; in fact, her guns had only been delivered three weeks before, and dockyard people were still on board, working on them.

The British battle cruisers and the *Bismarck-Prinz Eugen* team spotted each other almost simultaneously and both sides opened fire on each other at 5:52 A.M. The British commander, Admiral Holland, maintained radio silence until the firing began, in a vain attempt to achieve surprise against a task force that was already fully alert. By doing so, he forfeited the aid of the two heavy cruisers shadowing the *Bismarck*, as well as six nearby destroyers—a considerable loss of fire power.

The *Hood* opened up at a range of 12 miles. Admiral Holland ordered the fire be concentrated on the lead ship, which he supposed was the *Bismarck*. (The battleship and the *Prinz Eugen* had similar silhouettes, and the last reports from the cruisers indicated that the *Bismarck* was in the lead.) Captain John C. ''Jack'' Leach of the *Prince of Wales* realized that Holland had made a mistake, so he ordered his crew to fire on the *Bismarck*. The other British ships blazed away at the *Prinz Eugen*.

Despite the fire aimed at it, the well-trained crew of the *Prinz Eugen* trained accurate fire on the *Hood* and scored a direct hit on it within the first minute of the battle. It was soon blazing brightly from a large fire amidships. The *Bismarck* opened up about the same time, firing a salvo every 22 seconds, and she also found her range quickly. Meanwhile, the first salvo from the *Prince of Wales* missed the *Bismarck* by a half a mile.

The battle lasted about three minutes before Admiral Holland ordered his flagship, the *Hood*, to make a 20-degree turn to port. In the

middle of this maneuver, the *Hood* was caught by a full salvo from the *Bismarck*. The 46,000-ton British battle cruiser erupted in a huge explosion that threw a fireball hundreds of feet into the air. The bow and stern were only momentarily visible before they buckled and plunged into the ocean, carrying 1,416 men with her. Only three men survived the disaster.

The *Prince of Wales* turned sharply to avoid the flaming wreck and, within 60 seconds, came under the same heavy, accurate fire. A 15-inch shell from the *Bismarck* hit her, killing or wounding everyone on the bridge except the captain and one crewman. Several of her new guns broke down, so she was firing salvos of three shells instead of 10. German shells were falling so thickly about her that she could hardly observe the effect of her own fire through the cascading water. One shell from the *Prinz Eugen* landed in a magazine but failed to explode. Two other shells (of 203 millimeters) penetrated the ship below the water line and let in 600 tons of water into the aft compartments. The *Prince of Wales* was only seven miles from the *Bismarck* when she turned about, pouring smoke, at 6:03 A.M. The German ships stopped firing at 6:09 A.M., when the Prince was about 21,000 yards away. The Battle of the Denmark Strait, which had only lasted 20 minutes, was over. Because of Captain Leach's insubordination, the *Bismarck* had suffered two hits from the 14-inch guns of the *Prince*. Her speed was reduced from 31 to 28 knots and (more important) she was losing fuel oil.[5] Ernst Lindemann, the captain of the *Bismarck*, wanted to follow the *Prince of Wales*, finish her off, and then return to Germany.[6] Admiral Luetjens, however, was determined to obey orders, no matter what. He allowed the British to break off the battle and headed for the Atlantic, despite the fact the *Bismarck* was trailing oil. Meanwhile, the remaining British ships in the vicinity continued to shadow the German battleship.

By early afternoon, Luetjens had decided to put into the port of St. Nazaire, probably the only French port with a drydock large enough to hold the *Bismarck*. He also released the *Prinz Eugen* and sent it off on an independent commerce raid. That afternoon the *Bismarck* turned on her pursuers, who quickly fell back out of range; meanwhile, the *Prinz Eugen* made good her escape.

In the meantime, the British Admiralty spared no effort to gather ships for use against the *Bismarck*. Chasing the German battleship was the bulk of the Home Fleet, Admiral Somerville's forces from Gibraltar (including the battle cruiser *Renown*, the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal*, and the cruiser *Sheffield*), and even the battleships *Rodney* and *Ramillies* and the cruiser *Edinburgh*, which were ordered to abandon the convoys they were escorting and to take an intercept course for the *Bismarck*. Shortly before nightfall on May 24, Admiral Tovey contacted the 2nd

Cruiser Squadron (four cruisers and an aircraft carrier) and ordered it to slow down the *Bismarck*. Shortly before midnight, it launched several Swordfish torpedo bombers from the new aircraft carrier *Victorious*. They conducted two torpedo attacks against the *Bismarck*, and one ''eel'' struck the battleship amidships but exploded on the heavy-side armor and did no damage. During the night, Luetjens turned southeast, heading straight for France. The British, meanwhile, lost contact with the *Bismarck*; Luetjens, however, did not realize it, because the radar beams were still hitting the ship. He did not know that the beams were no longer bouncing back to the *Suffolk*'s receiver. For this reason, he sent a long message back to Naval Group West, describing the Battle of the Denmark Straits. He thus gave his own position away; however, the eager British navigators misplotted the data and directed Admiral Tovey to head northeast, toward the Iceland-Faeroes Passage, instead of toward France. By the time the mistake was discovered seven hours later, most of the destroyers were low in fuel and had to give up the chase.

The *Bismarck* was not discovered again until 10:30 on the morning of May 26, when a flying boat from the Coastal Command reported that it was about 690 miles west of Brest. By this point, it seemed likely that the *Bismarck* would reach port. Only the ships of Vice Admiral Sir John Somerville's Force H from Gibraltar were now within range of the *Bismarck*, and he was ordered not to engage her, because nothing in his command could match her 380-millimeter guns. The only chance the Royal Navy had left was the Swordfish biplanes of the *Ark Royal*. In seas tossing so violently that the flight deck pitched through a 56-foot arc, 15 biplanes took off. Initially, however, 11 of them attacked a British ship, the *Sheffield*, at 2:50 P.M. Five of the torpedoes exploded prematurely, and the *Sheffield* avoided the other six. Valuable time was lost in this near tragedy, but it did cause the British to replace the defective magnetic detonators on their torpedoes with contact detonators. At 10:55 P.M., the 15 Swordfish found and attacked the correct target. This was definitely the last chance the British would have; if the biplanes failed, the *Bismarck* would be close enough to France to be under the protective umbrella of the Luftwaffe.

The *Bismarck*'s 56 anti-aircraft guns blazed away at the Swordfish, but the violent pitching of the sea spoiled their aim. Several of the biplanes were hit, but none were shot down. All 15 biplanes attacked. Two could not launch their torpedoes, and 11 missed their target. One torpedo struck the *Bismarck* amidships, causing little damage. The fifteenth torpedo smashed into the steering engine room at rear of the ship, apparently causing little damage. However, the rudders had been hard over when the torpedo struck, and now they were stuck, and nothing could move them. Had they been at their normal positions, the *Bismarck* could have steered with her three propellers by altering

engine speeds, but not with the rudders hard over. This doomed the *Bismarck*, which began to circle, out of control. She swung within range of the surprised *Sheffield* and scored a hit on her, knocking out her radar and killing or wounding a dozen men. The *Sheffield* escaped under a smoke screen and reported the *Bismarck*'s condition to the capital ships of the Home Fleet, which quickly closed in.

During the night, German divers desperately tried to free the rudders, but without success. Luetjens signaled Hitler and promised to fight to the last. Hitler responded by thanking them for their sacrifice in the name of the German people. Luetjens also asked Grand Admiral Raeder to award the Knight's Cross to his gunnery officer, Commander Adalbert Schneider, for sinking the *Hood*. Hitler immediately granted the medal to the doomed officer. In an attempt to save at least part of his crew, Admiral Luetjens (who was now completely out of anti-aircraft ammunition) set his flak crews out to sea in rafts. None of them were rescued, however.[7]

The unequal battle began at 8:47 A.M. About 9 A.M., the bridge suddenly became an inferno of flames, and this is probably when Admiral Luetjens died, but because so few Germans lived to tell the tale of the last hours of the *Bismarck*, this is impossible to confirm. The German battleship was an easy target and was systematically pounded at long range by the British fleet. Once the German fire control system was destroyed, they came in closer, firing shells and torpedoes. Toward the end, the British battleships were firing salvo after salvo of one-tons shells into the *Bismarck* from a distance of only two miles. The battleship was also hit by seven torpedoes, but still did not sink. Fearing that the British might try to board the burning hulk, the crew detonated their scuttling charges. The *Bismarck* finally capsized to port and sank at 10:40 A.M. on May 27. Only 110 members of the *Bismarck*'s crew survived: 2,100 on were killed or drowned, including Captain Lindemann and the entire fleet staff, including Admiral Dr. Hans-Releff Riege, the fleet surgeon. The British made little effort to save them.

It had taken eight British battleships, two carriers, four heavy cruisers, seven light cruisers, 21 destroyers, and dozens of airplanes and supporting vessels to catch and destroy the *Bismarck*. In doing so, they had lost their biggest capital ship and a destroyer, and two battleships were so severely damaged that they were forced to spend months undergoing repairs in ''neutral'' American shipyards. They had, however, accomplished their mission: the pride of the German fleet was lost beneath the waves.

After the Bismarck debacle, Hitler never fully trusted Admiral Raeder's judgment again. Raeder wrote later,

> Whereas before this he had given me a relatively free hand as long as government policies or the other armed services were not involved, he now became

extremely critical and very apt to insist on agreement with his personal views … now he issued directives to me that radically restricted the movements of these major units. He forbade their sorties into the Atlantic.[8]

Hitler's declining confidence in Admiral Raeder was not necessarily bad news for the German Navy. Raeder had exhibited questionable tactical and operational judgment since before the war began, and since 1939 had shown a tendency to dissipate the navy's strength on raids of dubious value—such as the *Bismarck* sortie. Raeder had also been slow to appreciate the value of the submarine and had assigned U-boat construction a relatively low priority, even after it had proven its effectiveness against the British. Indeed, Hitler's major naval failure—other than going to war far too early—was probably retaining Erich Raeder as commander-in-chief of the Navy as long as he did.

After the death of the *Bismarck*, the Naval Operations Staff also concluded that the days of the Atlantic sorties were over. They decided not to complete the aircraft carrier, because it could not possibly break out into the Atlantic. Henceforth, German capital surface ships only had two major missions: patrol the Baltic, and remain a fleet in being, to tie down the British Navy.

Meanwhile, the Luftwaffe redeployed to the East, in preparation for the invasion of the Soviet Union. It would no longer play a major role in the Battle of the Atlantic. Henceforth, the German war at sea (and thus the Siege of Britain) would be waged almost exclusively by the submarine.

NOTES

1. Edward P. von der Porten, *The German Navy in World War II* (1969), p. 131 (hereafter cited as Porten).

2. Ibid., pp. 133–34.

3. See Theodor Krancke and H. J. Brennecke, *Pocket Battleships* (1958) and Charles E. Pfannes and Victor A. Salamone, *The Great Admirals of World War II*, vol. 2, *The Germans* (1984).

4. Lancelot E. Holland was born in 1887 (the son of a doctor) and joined the Royal Navy in 1902. He served in the China sector and was a gunnery officer during World War I. Promoted to captain in 1926, he headed the British naval mission to Greece in the early 1930s and was captain of the battleship H.M.S. *Revenge* (1934–35). Later he was naval aide-de-camp to King George VI, commander of the 2nd Battle Squadron of the Atlantic Fleet, and Admiralty representative to the Air Ministry. He commanded the 7th Cruiser Squadron in the Mediterranean before assuming command of the Battlecruiser Squadron. Admiral Holland was intelligent and well read. He was married but his only child (a son) died of polio in 1935 at age 18.

5. After the Battle of the Denmark Strait, the *Prince of Wales* was sent to the Pacific. It was sunk by Japanese torpedo-bombers in the South China Sea on December 10, 1941. Captain Leach went down with the ship, along with 326 of his men. Almost 1,200 of the ship's complement were rescued.

6. Ernst Lindemann was born in Altenkirchen, Rhineland-Palatinate in 1894. He joined the Imperial Navy in 1913 and was commissioned in 1915. He became a gunnery officer on battleships (including the *Schleswig-Holstein*) and fought in World War I (where he earned both grades of the Iron Cross). Later he served in the Reichswehr and was chief of the Construction Department in the OKM in the late 1930s. He was promoted to *Kapitaen zur See* in 1938 and assumed command of the *Bismarck* in August 1940.

7. Gerhard Bidlingmaier, ''Exploits and End of the Battleship *Bismarck*,'' U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 84 (July 1958), pp. 77–78.

8. Raeder, *My Life*, p. 358.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE NORTH AFRICAN SIDESHOW

While Hitler's paratroopers were being slaughtered on Crete, two of his mobile divisions, the 5th Light and 15th Panzer, were busy in another secondary theater: North Africa. The corps commander here, Erwin Rommel, was quite junior in rank (he had only been promoted to lieutenant general at the beginning of the year) and, at age 49, was quite young for his post. These facts led many of the senior army generals to suspect that Rommel, the former commander of the Fuehrer's bodyguard, owed his appointment to his political connections, rather than to ability. It is true that Hitler admired Rommel, at least until the latter part of 1942; however, most of those who questioned his ability were soon silenced, because Rommel was a tactical genius and a natural combat leader. In fact, no other theater of war is as closely associated with a single individual as the desert theater is associated with Erwin Rommel—the ''Desert Fox.''

Rommel, who won the *Pour le Merite* for bravery against the Italian Army in World War I, was summoned to Fuehrer Headquarters on February 6, 1941, where he was named commander of German Troops in North Africa. Initially his command consisted only of the X Italian Infantry Corps and the German Afrika Korps, which was not yet in Africa. His own immediate superior would be Italian Marshal Rodolfo Graziani.[1]

Later that day, Rommel met with Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, who confirmed his appointment and told him that the 5th Light Division would disembark in Tripoli from mid-February until mid-April. The 15th Panzer would follow and should be totally disembarked by the end of May. Rommel was instructed not to assume the offensive until both divisions had been completely disembarked.

When Rommel left Fuehrer Headquarters shortly afterward, neither von Brauchitsch nor Halder knew that he was a man to whom orders

were not sacred things; rather, throughout his career, he would depend on his own judgment of the situation and act accordingly. The idea of actually taking orders from an Italian general never entered his head, and it never would.

During the war, the rumor spread (and still has some believers) that the Afrika Korps was an elite, handpicked German force, specially trained for desert warfare. One Allied report stated that the men were forced to live in overheated barracks (to acclimate them to the heat) and had to run up and down the sandy beaches of Pomerania, dressed in heavy greatcoats, to get used to operating in desert terrain. This is simply not true. Due to the quickest of the Italian collapse, there was no time to institute a desert training program (although such a course was later set up at the Grafenwoehr Maneuver Area in northern Bavaria, to train replacements). Nor is it true that the men of the Afrika Korps were elite, handpicked volunteers. They were sent to Libya simply because they were available for immediate deployment.

The first unit to disembark in Tripoli was the 3rd Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion, which off-loaded on February 14–15. Rommel immediately sent them to the frontline, which he had set about 200 miles away. Rommel did not have a single tank on the ground in North Africa; nevertheless, he was already thinking of assuming the offensive, despite the fact that Hitler had intended for the Afrika Korps to serve as a blocking force (*Sperrverband*) only. When Rommel revealed his idea to OKH, however, he was called back to Germany, where Brauchitsch and Halder told him to forget all about attacking until the entire Afrika Korps had arrived (that is, at the end of May). Then—perhaps—he would be allowed to try to take Benghazi. Rommel argued against this timidity. Now was the time to strike, he declared, while the British were still weak from rushing so many of its veteran units to Greece. He spoke of winning a decisive victory in North Africa before they could return and of conquering Egypt and driving to the Suez Canal, possibly even recapturing German East Africa. Halder, who loathed Rommel from the beginning, smiled impolitely at this. What would Rommel need for such a purpose? he asked.

Two more panzer corps, Rommel replied.

''Even if you had them, how are you going to supply them and feed them?'' Halder asked.

''That's quite immaterial to me,'' Rommel replied. ''That's your pigeon.''

After some mutual recriminations, Brauchitsch and Halder rejected Rommel's plans. He returned to Africa with orders not to assume the offensive until late May at the earliest. These orders were intercepted by British intelligence, which relayed them to North Africa, where the Allied generals took them seriously—quite unlike Erwin Rommel, who tended to ignore orders he did not like.

When Rommel attacked on March 31, the British were not ready, either physically or psychologically. Rommel's First Cyrenacian campaign was a devastating success. Despite serious logistical problems and the fact that he had only a fraction of his forces available, he quickly smashed the British 2nd Armoured Division. Pursuing relentlessly across the desert, he surrounded and destroyed the remnants of the division at Mechili (April 7–8). Benghazi was captured on April 4. Prisoners included Lieutenant General Sir Philip Neame, commander of the Cyrenacian Command (formerly Western Desert Force), and General Sir Richard O'Connor, who had been sent forward as an advisor by Wavell. Major General Michael D. Gambler-Parry, the commander of the 2nd Armoured, was also captured.

With the greater part of Cyrenacian Command now smashed by Rommel's sudden blitzkrieg, the Desert Fox thrust forward again. Very little now lay between him and the Suez Canal, except for two obstacles: the two Australian brigades of Major General Leslie J. Morshead's tough 9th Australian Infantry Division, now located north of Mechili and retreating along the Coastal Road as rapidly as they could, and the fortress of Tobruk. If Rommel could cut off Morshead's brigades before they reached the fortress, his changes of overcoming the garrison in one pounce would be great. On April 8, Rommel was reinforced with the 605th Anti-Tank Battalion, the vanguard of the 15th Panzer Division. At its head was Major General Heinrich von Prittwitz und Gaffron, an energetic and experienced tank commander who had led the 2nd Brigade in France. Rommel immediately placed him in charge of a combat group made up of the 3rd Recon, 8th Machine Gun, and 605th Anti-Tank Battalions, and ordered him to continue the pursuit. He realized if he took Tobruk, he might well deal the British Empire a crippling blow.

Winston Churchill had the same thought. On April 7, he instructed Wavell that Tobruk was to be defended ''to the death, without thought of retirement.''[2] Wavell immediately began to reinforce Morshead with everything available. The bulk of the 7th Australian Division was inside the Tobruk perimeter on April 9, and, by the time Rommel launched his first major attack on the fortress, it was defended by the equivalent of six full infantry brigades, four regiments of artillery, two anti-tank regiments, 75 anti-aircraft guns, 45 tanks, and a total of 36,000 men. This force would be too much for Rommel to bypass. He would have to reduce it before he could invade Egypt.

On April 8, von Prittwitz cut off and captured one of the Australian rearguards (800 men), but he was unable to prevent Morshead from retiring into the fortress. On April 9, Rommel sent the Brescia and later the 102nd Trento Motorized Division (just up from Italy) to attack Tobruk from the west, while the 5th Light swept across the desert to strike it from the southeast. Major General Johannes Streich, the

commander of the 5th Light, was again slow, partially due to maintenance problems that Rommel felt should have been ignored. As a result, no attack could be launched against the fortress until April 12. Meanwhile, General von Prittwitz pushed too close to an Australian rearguard on April 10. An anti-tank gunner scored a direct hit on his armored car, killing him and his driver instantly.

Rommel's forces completed the encirclement of the Tobruk landfront on April 11. That same day, elements of Baron von Weckmar's 3rd Reconnaissance and Lieutenant Colonel Gustav Georg Knabe's 15th Motorcycle Battalion occupied Bardia, 65 miles east of Tobruk on the Libyan-Egypt frontier.

Rommel's first attack against Tobruk was launched by the Brescia Division and elements of the 5th Panzer Regiment. The Germans were surprised to find an anti-tank ditch that they could neither cross nor flank. After suffering several casualties to artillery fire, they retreated. The fierceness of the defense also surprised Rommel, who expected to meet only confused and disorganized opponents. Regretfully, he suspended his offensive until the rest of his combat forces could catch up.

The second attack came on the night of April 13–14. Lieutenant Colonel Gustav Ponath's 8th Machine Gun Battalion led the way, supported by a battalion of anti-aircraft guns. They crawled forward, demolished a section of the anti-tank ditch, and broke through the British perimeter. With Colonel Herbert Olbrich's 5th Panzer Regiment coming up behind him, Ponath formed a spearhead and drove toward the port of Tobruk.

Olbrich made good progress initially but advanced on too narrow a front. The Italians assigned the task of covering his flank failed to do so, and, within a few miles of the town, he met stiff resistance from Fort Pilastrino and the 1st Royal Artillery Regiment, firing over open sights. Worried about being cut off, Olbrich ordered a retreat when he was attacked by a detachment of British cruiser tanks—a move that was tantamount to abandoning Ponath and his men to their fate. When he learned what had happened, Rommel desperately tried to organize a rescue attempt, but it was afternoon before he could get the Ariete Armored Division into line. Then a few British shells landed nearby. ''The confusion was indescribable,'' Rommel wrote later. ''The division broke up in complete disorder, turned tail and streamed back in several directions.''[3]

Rommel tried to break through again on April 16. His objective was Ras el Madauer (Hill 187), which dominated much of the Australian line. The attack was led by the Ariete Armored Division and part of the Trento Motorized Division. They were supported by several German companies (directly behind them) and German artillery. In this way, Rommel hoped to obtain better results from his allies.

Ariete, probably the best of the Italian divisions, was in pitiful mechanical shape. It had started the offensive with 100 tanks, but more

than 80 percent of them had broken down before it even met the enemy. Those that were left were no match for the British tanks. In fact, there was a joke that went around the Afrika Korps. ''Who,'' the question went, ''are the bravest soldiers in the world?''

''The Italians,'' was the answer.

''Why the Italians?''

''Because they go into combat with the equipment that they have.''

To Erwin Rommel, however, it was no laughing matter. ''It made one's hair stand on end to see the sort of equipment with which the Duce had sent his troops into battle,'' he wrote.[4]

The Ariete made good progress at first. They pushed back the Australians and even succeeded in overrunning Ras el Madauer. Then one of their periodic panics seized the Italians, who broke for the rear or rushed to surrender to the Australians. Among the Germans killed in this battle was Colonel Max Eichstaedt, the commander of the 33rd Panzer Artillery Regiment.

Colonel Ponath, meanwhile, put up a fierce resistance. Surrounded by the Australians, he dug in and held out for days. Then, at 11 P.M. on April 20, with his unit reduced to a handful of men and his command post surrounded, Colonel Ponath, who had already been wounded twice, led a desperate breakout attempt. An Australian rifleman, firing at nearly point-blank range, blew his brains out. The 8th Machine Gun Battalion was nearly wiped out. Only 116 of the 500 men who had been surrounded on April 14 escaped.[5]

Rommel was embittered and blamed General Streich and Colonel Olbrich for the loss of the 8th Machine Gun. He believed in two qualities above all others: loyalty and efficiency. Now he set about clearing house with a vengeance, and he sacked everyone whom he believed lacking in either quality. Rommel had never been General Halder's choice for this post because he had never undergone General Staff training and because Halder felt that Rommel had been promoted beyond his capabilities and had used political influence to obtain advancement. In any case, several General Staff officers were allied with General Halder against Erwin Rommel and at least one of them tried to engineer his removal. There was also beyond doubt a secret correspondence taking place between Halder and an officer on Rommel's staff, and Rommel correctly felt that there was a conspiracy afoot; therefore, he conducted a bloodless Night of the Long Knives and sent those whom he considered disloyal or inefficient back to Germany. They included General Streich; Colonel Olbrich; Hans-Henning von Holtzendorff, commander of the 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment; Lieutenant Colonel Count von Schwerin of the 200th Special Purposes Regiment; Major Wolfgang Hausser, Streich's operations officer; Major Ehlers, the operations officer of the Afrika Korps; and Colonel Claus

von dem Borne, the chief of staff of the Afrika Korps. Major General Heinrich Kirchheim was named temporary commander of the 5th Light. Rommel lived to regret this appointment, because Kirchheim did not turn out to be a good divisional commander, so Rommel sacked him as well, and replaced him with Major General Johannes von Ravenstein. Meanwhile, Major General Baron Hans-Karl von Esebeck assumed command of the 15th Panzer Division.[7]

There were howls of protest from OKH concerning Rommel's actions; apparently Halder and his friends in Berlin, who were agitating for Rommel's dismissal behind the scenes, did not believe he would have the gall to strike down their spies and confederates in Africa. Halder had even gone so far as to send a special staff to Africa, under the direction of Colonel Alfred Gause, to coordinate supply matters and serve as a liaison officer between Rommel and the Italians. Major Frederick Wilhelm von Mellenthin, the future intelligence officer for the Afrika Korps, was a member of this special staff. Rommel's reception was frigid, and with good reason: Gause had orders not to place himself under Rommel's command. The Desert Fox gave him a quick and simple choice: subordinate himself to Rommel's direction or return home at once. The East Prussian quickly yielded; in fact, he turned out to be a loyal subordinate and good chief of staff, with little talent for, or interest in, intrigue.

Von Mellenthin wrote later,

> Rommel was not an easy man to serve; he spared those around him as little as he spared himself. An iron constitution and nerves of steel were needed to work with Rommel, but I must emphasize that although Rommel was sometimes embarrassingly outspoken with senior commanders, yet once he was convinced of the efficiency and loyalty of those in his immediate entourage, he never had a harsh word for them.[8]

Rommel attacked Tobruk again on April 30, but was again repulsed. Both sides now settled down for a long siege, mercifully unaware that it would last another 221 days. Stalemate had set in on the North African Front. For the next eight months, breaking the Siege of Tobruk would be a matter of the highest priority in the British war effort. Rommel's forces, however, would remain a low priority in Berlin, and with considerable justification: on June 22, 1941, Adolf Hitler committed 3 million men to Operation Barbarossa—the invasion of the Soviet Union.

NOTES

1. Rodolfo Graziani (1882–1955) had commanded a regiment in World War I and emerged from that conflict as the youngest colonel in the Royal Army.

He later was named commander of Colonial Troops in Tripolitania and suppressed a rebellion in Libya with great severity; in fact, he gained the nickname ''Breaker of the Natives.'' He served as vice governor of Cyrenaica (1926–30), governor of Cyrenaica (1930–34), governor of Italian Somaliland (1935–36), commander of the XI Corps (1936–37), viceroy of Ethiopia (1937–38), commander of the 10th Army (1939–40), and governor-general of Libya and commander-in-chief, North Africa (1940–41). Although a Fascist, he was anti-German. In 1941, after he wished aloud for the day when he could lead an Italian Army against the Germans, he was relieved of his command. Graziani, however, remained loyal to the Duce. After Mussolini was deposed and then restored to power by the Germans, he set up his Social Republic and named Graziani his minister of war and commander of the Ligurian Army (1943–45). After the fall of the Social Republic and Nazi Germany, Graziani was convicted as a minor war criminal and was imprisoned until 1950 for collaborating with the Germans.

2. Strawson, pp. 56–57.

3. Rommel Papers, pp. 125–26; Playfair, vol. 2, p. 37.

4. Rommel Papers, p. 127.

5. The survivors of the 8th Machine Gun Battalion were incorporated into the 200th Panzer Engineer Battalion.

6. Johannes Streich was sent to the Eastern Front, where he briefly commanded the 16th Motorized Division. He was not considered a success here, either, and also ran afoul of Heinz Guderian, then commanding the 2nd Panzer Army. Streich spent the rest of the war in staff assignments with the Replacement Army. He was promoted to lieutenant general in October 1943. He surrendered to the Western Allies at the end of the war. He died in Hamburg in 1977.

7. Kirchheim (1882–1973) spent the rest of the war in minor staff appointments.

8. F. W. von Mellenthin, *Panzer Battles* (1956), p. 54 (hereafter cited as Mellenthin).

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CHAPTER XXX

PRELUDE TO BARBAROSSA

While Erwin Rommel struggled to take Tobruk with fewer than two German divisions, 75 percent of the German Army secretly deployed in assembly areas in northern Norway, Finland, East Prussia, occupied Poland, the Protectorate and Romania, for Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union.

THE PLAN

German operational planning for the invasion of the Soviet Union had began in July 1940. After some initial studies by Colonel von Lossberg and Colonel Hans von Greiffenberg of the OKH operations staff, Halder gave Major General Erich Marcks, the chief of staff of the 18th Army, the task of drawing up a basic plan for the invasion of the Soviet Union on July 29.

Marcks looked like the stereotype of a studious college professor, down to his wire-rimmed glasses. He was, however, a highly capable General Staff officer. His final plan was ready on August 5, and it formed the basis for Operation Barbarossa in its final form. It envisioned a campaign of two phases: first, the Soviet armies close to the frontier would be destroyed in battles of encirclement; then, the most valuable industrial regions in the Soviet Union would be occupied, including Leningrad, Moscow, and the Donetz Basin of the Ukraine. To accomplish this task, Marcks proposed that two army groups, North and South, be created. They would be divided by the Pripyat Marshes (a vast swamp 150 miles from north to south, and more than 300 miles long), and their mission would be to attain the Archangel-Gorky-Rostov line. Moscow, he stated, ''constitutes the economic, political, and

spiritual center of the U.S.S.R. Its capture would destroy the coordination of the Russian state.''[1]

Halder accepted Marcks's basic ideas and turned the detailed planning over to Lieutenant General Friedrich Paulus, the new deputy chief of the General Staff for operations, on September 17. Paulus retained Marcks's basic concepts, but added a third army group and specified that three major thrusts take place: Army Group North to Leningrad, Army Group Center to Moscow, and Army Group South to Kiev. Moscow was to remain the primary objective.

Brauchitsch and Halder presented the plan to Hitler on December 5. Hitler had only one major objection to it, but it was one of the greatest significance: he wanted to defeat the Russians on the northern and southern wings first and take the Ukraine and Leningrad. ''Moscow,'' he said, ''is of no great importance.''[2] He was more concerned with capturing the Baltic States and the agricultural and industrial complexes to the south. The loss of the Ukraine and its Donetz Industrial Basin, he believed, would wreck the Soviet economy and cause the people to turn against the Communists. Then, he felt, the capture of Moscow would be an easy matter.

The OKH generals did not protest when Hitler changed the fundamental focus of their plan. They had learned that remonstrating with the Fuehrer did no good; nevertheless, they continued to regard Moscow as the main objective, for both political and military reasons. It was, after all, the transportation and communications hub of the Soviet Union. They believed that a thrust toward Moscow would compel the Red Army to oppose it with most of its divisions, which would give the German Army an opportunity to encircle and destroy them. Apparently Halder and von Brauchitsch felt that, once the campaign was under way, events would dictate the correct course of action. ''A conspiracy of silence descended on the subject,'' Cooper wrote later.[3] Major General (later General of Artillery) Walter Warlimont, the deputy chief of operations at OKW, wrote, ''It later became known that their reasoning was that, in time, the course of the campaign would compel even Hitler to go back to the original Army concept. This was to a certain extent taking the easy way out and it proved to be no more than self-deception.''[4]

As a result, the campaign would begin with the Fuehrer and his senior generals divided over the issues of what was the major objective of the invasion. The seeds of disaster had been sown.

Hitler's decision to invade Russia at this time did not meet unanimous approval within the Wehrmacht. Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, for one, objected to the entire idea of invading Russia, as did Hermann Goering and Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel. Rather than risk another scathing dressing down, Keitel sent him a written memoranda in

August 1940. Hitler, who now surrounded himself only with ''yes-men,'' summoned him to his office and gave him a vicious reprimand. Deeply wounded, Keitel suggested that the Fuehrer find an OKW chief whose judgment he trusted more. Hitler flew into a rage and heaped a torrent of abuse on Keitel's head. He did not have the right to resign, the dictator shouted, but would serve until he had no further use for him. The humiliated field marshal left the room without saying a word. Now he saw clearly part of the price he would have to pay for accepting promotions he did not deserve and a position for which he was intellectually not qualified. His reaction to this impossible situation was to submit completely; he would carry out the will of the Fuehrer, no matter what that entailed. Keitel, of course, could not foresee that he was taking a road that would end at the gallows in Nuremberg in 1946.

In May 1941, Keitel signed the infamous Commissar Order, in which he commanded that German soldiers shoot Red political officers immediately after they were captured, without courts-martial or trials of any kind. Several generals protested against this criminal order (including von Bock and Guderian), which directed them to shoot unarmed prisoners of war, but Keitel insisted that it be obeyed to the letter. This order, which originated with Hitler, can be traced to a speech he made to his commanders on March 30, in which he ordered that all Soviet officials, civilian or military, were to be shot when captured, even if they surrendered. In Russia, he said, the German soldier was not to be bound by the ordinary rules of war.[5] This speech set the tone for one of the cruelest conflicts in modern history.

The Commissar Order was not the only controversial directive issued that spring. Reichsfuehrer-SS Heinrich Himmler, who calmly estimated that approximately 30 million Slavs alone would have to be allowed to starve in the East before German colonization began, secretly gave orders to the *Einsatzgruppen*: racially inferior types, such as Jews and gypsies, and in some cases Slavs, were to be exterminated, as were known Communists, former officials, homosexuals, residents of mental institutions, and so forth. The depopulated lands could then be recolonized by Germans and Germanic peoples, including Danes, Dutch, Swedes, Norwegians, and perhaps even Englishmen, after the war was won. Hitler himself urged his men to be ruthless. ''This enemy consists not of soldiers but to a large extent only of beasts,'' he said. ''This is a war of extermination.'' Neither the rules of the Hague Convention (on the law of warfare) nor the Geneva Convention (on prisoners of war) applied to this war, he said, since the Soviet Union was not a signatory to either agreement. In early May, he issued an order forbidding the army to prosecute German soldiers who killed or mistreated Soviet civilians.

THE NEW WAVES

While the political maneuvering continued behind the scenes, General Fromm and his men were working feverishly, raising new divisions for Operation Barbarossa. Hitler demanded that the army expand from 120 to 180 combat divisions for his invasion of the Soviet Union, and the Replacement Army and the Wehrkreise raised no fewer than five new waves of troops for the campaign.

The Wave 11 infantry divisions were created by transferring cadres from existing divisions to the new unit and then ''rounding them out'' with new recruits from the draft class of 1920. Simultaneously, other new draftees were transferred to the old divisions, so that no division was too badly depleted and each would have at least a sizable contingent of combat veterans. Each old division transferred three battalions back to its home Wehrkreis, where they were incorporated into a new division. All of the Wave 11 divisions were three-regiment divisions (that is, all had three infantry regiments). The Wave 11 divisions were numbered between 121 and 137.

The Wave 11 divisions were all more or less ready by October 1940; by then, the Replacement Army had already begun work on the Wave 12 divisions, which were formed in the same manner as the Wave 11 divisions. The divisions of the 12th Wave were the 97th, 99th, 100th, and 101st Jaeger and the 102nd through 113th Infantry Divisions. The Jaeger divisions (light infantry divisions) were formed from the same cadres, but controlled only two rifle regiments and were equipped as pursuit divisions. Ten Wave 12 divisions had been formed and activated by the end of December 1940.

The Wave 13 divisions were formed in a manner similar to the Wave 11 divisions. They were not, however, nearly as well equipped and were not designed for combat on the Eastern Front; rather, they were used as occupation or garrison units to free other divisions for employment in the East. All were posted to France or Belgium except the 319th Infantry Division, which was used to garrison the English Channel Islands of Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney, Sark, Herm, and Jethou. There were nine divisions in the 13th Wave, numbered between 302 and 327. All were infantry and all were formed and had completed their unit training by early 1941.

The Home Army began forming the Wave 14 divisions in November 1940. They were also designed to perform occupation duties in the West and the 333rd and 335th Divisions had a high percentage of Polish soldiers in German service. There were eight Wave 14 divisions (all infantry): the 332nd, 333rd, 335th, 336th, 337th, 339th, 340th, and 342nd.

During the first five months of 1941, the Replacement Army formed 15 Wave 15 divisions, all numbered in the 700 block. All were static

(non-motorized) two-regiment divisions, composed mainly of older men (many of them from the *Landeschuetzen* battalions), Volksdeutsche, or foreign personnel. They reflected the shortage of young men of military age in the Third Reich and the growing shortage of equipment in the depots of the Home Army. They had an artillery battalion instead of the usual four-battalion artillery regiment, and most of them had engineer, signal, and reconnaissance companies, instead of battalions. They had no divisional anti-tank battalions, and their infantry regiments had no 13th and 14th Companies (that is, they had no infantry cannon, heavy weapons, or anti-tank units). They were all sent to France or the Balkans. The units sent to Yugoslavia and Greece were later renumbered and converted into Jaeger divisions.[7]

In addition to these units, the 90th Light Division was created from miscellaneous units in North Africa, the 199th Infantry Division was formed in Norway, and the 4th, 5th, and 6th Mountain Divisions were organized in southern Germany and Austria. In June 1941, four Wave 16 reserve infantry brigades were formed: the 201st, 202nd, 203rd, and 204th. All were designated security units, and the 201st and 203rd were upgraded to security divisions in the summer of 1942. None of them had organic artillery units initially, although some were added later on. Also, some later formed their on ''unofficial'' artillery units and even panzer platoons, using captured Soviet equipment.

As a result of the massive reorganization in the winter of 1940–41, 84 new divisions of all types were created, at a cost of 17 of the 1939 divisions (which were converted to other types of units or broken up). As a result, in June 1941, Hitler had 205 combat divisions—although they were not that much more powerful than 140 divisions that had invaded France and the Low Countries in 1940. The number of panzers had not increased, even though their quality was higher, because they had more PzKw IIIs and IVs and fewer PzKw Is, PzKwIIs, and tanks of Czech manufacture.

General Fromm, however, issued a clear warning: at the end of May, he had only 80,000 men in the reinforcement (march) battalions and they had only three months' training. In addition, only about 350,000 men (mainly from the classes of 1921 and 1922) would be available for the rest of 1941. In other words, if German casualties in Barbarossa exceeded 430,000, the Home Army would not be able to replace them. In addition, German tank production—although it had improved slightly—was still quite low. Less than 200 tanks had been produced per month in 1940. German industry would increase its quarterly tank production from less than 700 in the first quarter of 1941 to 1,100 in the last quarter of the year, but this would still be woefully inadequate for its task in Russia, as we shall see.

DEPLOYMENT

OKH had three army groups and several smaller formations at its disposal in the spring of 1941. In the north lay Field Marshal von Leeb's Army Group North, which included the 18th Army (Colonel General von Kuechler), the 16th Army (Colonel General Busch), and 4th Panzer Group (Colonel General Hoepner). Its missions were to annihilate the Soviet forces in the Baltic States and to capture Leningrad. The weakest of the army groups, it controlled 29 divisions, of which three were panzer and three were motorized. It was supported by Colonel General Keller's 1st Air Fleet (660 aircraft).

In the middle of the German line lay its strongest force: Field Marshal von Bock's Army Group Center. North to south, it controlled the 3rd Panzer Group (Colonel General Hoth); 9th Army (Colonel General Strauss); 4th Army (Field Marshal von Kluge); and 2nd Panzer Group (Colonel General Guderian). Its initial mission was to destroy the strong Soviet forces in the Brest-Vilna (Vilnius)-Smolensk triangle, near the German frontier, and then to wheel north or continue to drive toward Moscow, as ordered. Bock's forces totaled 50 divisions, of which nine were panzer and six were motorized. It was supported by Kesselring's 2nd Air Fleet, which had 1,180 airplanes.

Between southern Poland and the Black Sea lay Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group South. It was divided into a northern wing, concentrated between the Pripyat Marshes and the Carpathians, and a southern wing in Romania. In the north lay the strike force: Reichenau's 6th Army, Kleist's 1st Panzer Group, and General of Infantry Carl-Heinrich von Stuelpnagel's 17th Army. To the south lay Colonel General von Schobert's 11th Army, as well as the 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies, under Generals Petre Dumitrescu and Nicolae Ciuperca, respectively. The northern wing was ordered to destroy Russian General Mikhail Kirponos's strong forces in Galicia and the Western Ukraine, secure the Dnieper crossings, and capture Kiev. The southern wing had the task of protecting the Ploesti oilfields and, for that reason, 11th Army's divisions were interlaced with the less dependable Romanian divisions as ''corset stays.'' In all, Rundstedt had 41 German divisions, of which five were panzer and three were motorized. He also controlled 14 Romanian divisions (about 150,000 men) and was supported by Colonel General Loehr's 4th Air Fleet, which contained 930 aircraft.

To the north of the main battlefront, Finnish Marshal Carl Mannerheim deployed 14 divisions (500,000 men) in the Finnish sector. In July he also was to begin an offensive, on both sides of Lake Lagoda, in conjunction with Leeb's efforts to take Leningrad. Finland, however, was to enter the war as a co-belligerent and not as a German ally; its orders came from Mannerheim, not from Berlin.

North of Mannerheim's divisions lay the Far North sector, where Falkenhorst's Army of Norway deployed four German divisions in two corps (about 67,000 men) in northern Norway and northern Finland. It also controlled a Finnish corps. The objective of the Army of Norway was to capture the Soviet port of Murmansk. It was supported by Luftwaffe Command Kirkenes (of Stumpff's 5th Air Fleet), which had only 70 aircraft. (Hitler had ordered that Stumpff keep the bulk of his forces to the south, in case the British decided to invade Norway, which was a recurring fear with him.)

In addition, OKH initially held 28 divisions (including two panzer and three motorized divisions) in reserve. In all, OKH deployed 148 divisions, including 17 panzer and 13 motorized divisions. Its Barbarossa forces included 3,050,000 men, 3,350 tanks, 7,184 guns, 600,000 motor vehicles, and 625,000 horses, excluding the Far North sector, which was an OKW theater. OKH also earmarked a dozen additional divisions (including two panzer divisions and a motorized division) for Operation Barbarossa. Table 30.1 shows the Order of Battle of OKH's German forces on June 22, 1941.

Table 30.1
Order of Battle, OKH German Forces, Eastern Front, June 22, 1941

Army Group North: Field Marshal Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb
18th Army: Colonel General Georg von Kuechler
4th Panzer Group: Colonel General Erich Hoepner
16th Army: Colonel General Ernst Busch
Army Group Center: Field Marshal Fedor von Bock
3rd Panzer Group: Colonel General Hermann Hoth
9th Army: Colonel General Adolf Strauss
4th Army: Field Marshal Guenther von Kluge
2nd Panzer Group: Colonel General Heinz Guderian
Army Group South: Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt
6th Army: Field Marshal Walter von Reichenau
1st Panzer Group: Colonel General Ewald von Kleist
17th Army: Colonel General Heinrich von Stuelpnagel
3rd Romanian Army: General Petre Dumintrescu
4th Romanian Army: General Nicolae Ciuperca
11th Army: Colonel General Ritter Eugen von Schobert

Note:
Army Excludes the Far North (Lapland) Sector, an OKW front, which included Mountain Corps Norway (General of Mountain Troops Eduard Dietl) and other elements of the Army of Norway (Colonel General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst). Mountain Corps Norway later became the Army of Lapland (January 14, 1942) and then the 20th Mountain Army (June 22, 1942).

OKH thus planned to conquer the Soviet Union with 160 divisions—18 more than it had employed in the conquest of France. The area of operations in Barbarossa, however, was more than 1 million square miles—about five times the size of France. In addition, although the number of panzer and motorized divisions had more than doubled (from 15 in May 1940 to 32 in June 1941), the number of tanks had increased only from 2,574 to 3,332.

The German armies were, in fact, a far cry from the highly mobile, incredibly well-equipped units that Goebbels' propaganda ministry made them out to be, and many people still believe they were. Only 46 of the German divisions available for the invasion were fully equipped with German arms. The rest were either deficient in equipment (mainly in assault and anti-tank guns) or were outfitted with captured arms and equipment, primarily from France and Czechoslovakia. Eighty-four infantry divisions and even three of the motorized divisions were equipped with foreign vehicles. In fact, counting foreign equipment, the German Army had 2,000 different types of vehicles, 70 different types of guns, and 52 models of anti-aircraft guns. As a result, maintenance would be a nightmare in the Russian campaign, and the breakdown rates in all units would be extremely high. In addition, most of the infantry divisions were still heavily dependent upon horsepower. Some 119 divisions were still horse-drawn, and 77 of these had horse-drawn supply units (including 15,000 Polish two-wheeled *Panjewagen* [peasant wagons]).[9] Most of the divisional artillery regiments depended solely on horses or mules. Hitler and his generals were clearly gambling on a war of short duration, although few of them appreciated the risk they were running. Most German commanders at all levels favored the invasion of the Soviet Union, because they felt that it was only a matter of time before Moscow tried to ''stab Germany in the back'' and because they were stimulated by their successes in Poland, France, and the Balkans, and felt that they could easily defeat Stalin's legions. They were probably right on the first point, but, in retrospect, it is clear that they overestimated their own abilities and greatly underestimated those of the Soviet Union. Overconfidence and German arrogance played a major role in the disaster that overtook the German Army in Russia at the end of 1941. Following the tremendous success of the blitzkrieg in France and the Balkans, the military technocrats abandoned their previous caution and were now convinced that no power in Europe could halt the Wehrmacht.[10] OKH, for example, had replacement equipment available for a campaign of only three months, but felt no need to press for the higher priority in armaments, because it felt its reserves would be adequate for the conquest of the Soviet Union. On December 3, 1940, General Jodl unequivocally stated that it was correct to reduce the armaments allocations for the army in favor of

the navy and Luftwaffe, since Operation Barbarossa could be fought with existing equipment. General Fromm obviously agreed with Jodl.[11] Even more incredibly, OKH did not even bother to prepare for the possibility of a winter campaign and only purchased enough winter clothing to supply a greatly reduced army of occupation. This overconfidence and short-sightedness would cost a great many soldiers fingers and toes lost to frostbite in the months ahead.

While OKH directed operations in the East, German-held territories elsewhere came under the control of OKW, an arrangement that became more and more solidified as the war progressed. By 1942, it would become popular to refer to the Russian Front as an ''OKH Theater'' and to any other sector as an ''OKW Theater,'' in effect creating another command division in the upper levels of the German armed forces. In June 1941, Germany had 38 divisions in western Europe, one in Denmark, seven in Norway, seven in the Balkans, and two in North Africa. All were under the control of OKW.

THE UNPREPARED LUFTWAFFE

Meanwhile, the Battle of Britain played itself out in the west. The last major raids occurred in April and May 1941, and they seemed to indicate that the German Air Force was resuming the battle with renewed vigor. During the raid of May 10, London suffered its worst night of the war. More than 1,400 people were killed and 1,800 wounded, and some fires continued to burn for 11 days. Despite their ferocity, these attacks were just part of a diversion, because the Luftwaffe was secretly redeploying to the East. On May 21, Kesselring moved his headquarters to Posen in occupied Poland, and Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle became the sole air commander in the West. Of the 44 bomber groups previously operating against Britain, only four remained in France and the Low Countries. Of the fighter wings, only JG 2 ''Richthofen'' and JG 26 ''Schlageter'' remained in the English Channel sector. By the end of June 1941, the West was strictly a backwater theater, looked upon more as a reservoir of reserves for the Eastern Front than anything else.[12]

OKL committed 2,840 aircraft to Operation Barbarossa, of which about 1,910 were combat aircraft. This amounted to 59 percent of all combat aircraft in the Luftwaffe. Its other 1,340 combat aircraft were divided among the 3rd Air Fleet in the West (660 aircraft), the 5th Air Fleet in Norway (120), the X Air Corps and Air Command Afrika in the Mediterranean sector (370 airplanes), and various air defense units in Germany (only 190 aircraft). Keller's 1st Air Fleet supported Army Group North, Loehr's 4th Air Fleet flew close air support for Army Group South, and Kesselring's 2nd (the largest) was assigned the task

Table 30.2
Strength of the Luftwaffe by Aircraft Type, May 10, 1940, and June 21, 1941

Aircraft Type	10 May 40	21 Jun 41
Short-Range Reconnaissance	335	440
Long-Range Reconnaissance	322	393
Single-Engine Fighter	1,356	1,440
Night-Fighters	—	263
Twin-Engine Fighters	354	188
Bombers	1,711	1,511
Dive-Bombers	414	424
Ground-Attack	50	—
Coastal	240	223
TOTAL:	4,782	4,882

Source:
Williamson Murray, *Strategy for Defeat: The Luftwaffe, 1933–1945* (1983), p. 80.

of supporting Army Group Center. In addition, the Luftwaffe committed two anti-aircraft corps (I and II) to the offensive.

One reason that Hermann Goering opposed the invasion of the Soviet Union was the fact that the Luftwaffe was in strategic disarray. Under the poor management of Ernst Udet and others, the German aviation industry and the office of air armaments had barely been able to maintain the strength the Luftwaffe had had the year before (see Table 30.2).

Other than allowing himself to be talked into accepting the post of *Generalluftzeugmeister*, Udet's major mistakes were in his selection of aircraft to succeed current models. He decided to base the Luftwaffe's offensive capability on four main combat types by early 1940—the Me-109, the Ju-88, the Me-210, and the He-177. Although handicapped by its short range, the Me-109 was a successful aircraft. The Ju-88, however, had a great many problems and never really achieved the results expected of it, while the Me-210 and He-177 were total failures and greatly inhibited the Luftwaffe's ability to wage war from 1940 on.

The Ju-88 was developed by Dr. Heinrich Koppenburg, the managing director of Junkers. It was originally designed as a superspeed, unarmed, six-ton bomber, and was successfully test-flown in March 1938. Nicknamed the ''Wonder Bomber'' by the Air General Staff, it never lived up to expectations, mainly because the Technical Office kept adding requirements for it and modifications to it—including the requirement that it be able to dive. Both Udet and General Jeschonnek were firm believers that an effective bomber had to be able to dive in order to make an accurate attack. Because of these constant modification, production was delayed time and again. Eventually some 25,000

changes were required and the weight of some models exceeded 13 tons—more than twice the weight of the original prototypes. Engineer General Marquardt later wrote, with considerable justification, that the dive-bombing concept ruined the Luftwaffe.[13] It certainly ruined the Ju-88. The maximum speed of the prototypes exceeded 400 mph (faster than the Spitfires or Hurricanes), but the Ju-88A-4 could not even reach 280 mph. Its climbing rate and handling characteristics were so badly reduced that the pilots referred to it as a ''flying barn door'' in 1939. The German aviation industry nevertheless manufactured 15,000 during the war, mainly because the Technical Office could develop nothing better. They were used in a variety of roles, including horizontal and dive-bombing, long-range reconnaissance, torpedo bombing, night-fighting, and others. The Ju-88 was effective in some of these missions, but this did not make up for the fact that Germany had no modern bomber in 1941.

If the Ju-88 was a disappointment, the He-177 was a disaster. In early 1938, Udet finally decided that Germany might need a long-range bomber after all. He issued specifications that it would have to carry two tons of bombs and have a range of more than 1,000 miles. That summer. Ernst Heinkel showed Udet and Jeschonnek the mock-up of the He-177, which featured four engines joined to two propellers by a coupling arrangement. A few months later Udet, with the approval of Jeschonnek and Lieutenant General Rulof Lucht (chief of staff of the Office of Air Armaments) added the requirement that the He-177 be capable of diving at a 60-degree angle. ''The He-177 must be capable of diving at all costs,'' Udet told Heinkel.

Heinkel was horrified. ''You can't make a dive-bomber out an aircraft that size!'' he exclaimed. The He-177 weighed 15 tons at the time.

''For all practical purposes it's a twin-engine aircraft,'' Udet responded. ''If the twin-engined Ju-88 can dive, why shouldn't the He-177?''[14]

As a result of the new requirement, Heinkel was forced to increase the weight of the He-177 to 32 tons, at a considerable sacrifice of speed, maneuverability, and safety. On November 19, 1938, it was test-flown at Rechlin and was declared unsatisfactory because of high engine oil temperatures. Udet nevertheless authorized production, but at a low priority. Only three He-177s per month were being produced in June 1940.

When the Luftwaffe was defeated in the Battle of Britain, Udet's failures were also made public for the entire world to see. It was clear that Germany had lost its technological lead in military aviation. In an effort to regain it quickly, Udet gambled. In October 1940, he ordered the He-177 into mass production, despite its negative test results. This demanded a time-consuming reorganization of the German aircraft

industry. The He-111 was taken out of production, the bomber factories were retooled, and mass production of the He-177 began. All of this took months. Only when it came off the production line were the defects of the aircraft fully discovered. Most serious was its tendency to explode in mid-air while in straight and level flight for no apparent reason. Apparently the fuel lines dripped on the hot manifolds. It also broke apart during dives, and its connecting rods were prone to breaking, penetrating the crankcase, and letting hot oil fly everywhere. Even if fire and explosions were avoided, the valves fouled after a maximum of six hours' flying time. Wood and Gunston described it as ''possibly the most troublesome and unsatisfactory aircraft in military history . . . no engines in bomber history have caught fire so often in normal cruising flight.''[15] The He-177 became known as the *Luftwaffenfeuerzueg* (the Luftwaffe's lighter). More than 50 prototypes broke up during dives or exploded in level flight, killing their entire crew. Despite the fact that 1,446 were manufactured during the war, only 33 had been accepted for service by late 1942. Of these, only two were still operational a few weeks later.[16]

Because of the loss of so many prototypes, the He-177 had to be withdrawn from the production lines. The aircraft industry had to be reorganized and retooled again, at the cost of tens of thousands of man hours, so it could resume the production of the He-111, a bomber that was already known to be obsolete. The waste of raw materials was tremendous.

The Me-210 was another Udet disaster. It was designed by Professor Willi Messerschmitt as a multipurpose replacement for the Me-110, the Ju-87, and the Hs-123. The plans for the Me-210 were approved by the Udet's Technical Office in the summer of 1938, and Jeschonnek had required 1,000 airplanes, even before the first prototype was flown, so great was their confidence in the designer. They had both been taken in. Udet was ''no match for the tricks of the industrialists,'' his adjutant, Colonel Max Pendele, noted later,[17] and, in this case, neither was General Jeschonnek. The Me-210 prototypes were unstable and unpredictable in flight and whipped into spins at high angles of attack. Even so, Udet ordered the progressive phasing out of the unsatisfactory Me-110; reliance on the Me-210 was total.

When it was brought into production in 1941, the Me-210 proved to be a total failure. Airplane after airplane crashed, and pilots looked on it as a deathtrap. State Secretary Milch finally cancelled the program altogether. He estimated that the Me-210 project cost the Luftwaffe 600 aircraft.

As a result of the failure of the Technical Office and the German aviation industry, the Luftwaffe was rapidly becoming an outmoded branch by the spring of 1941. The situation was bad enough when it was just fighting the British. Now, however, three-fifths of the

Luftwaffe was committed to a second front. It was now clear to many in the air force that Germany had better successfully eliminate Stalin and his party in 1941, as Hitler envisioned, or face a war of attrition with the Soviet Union. If that occurred, the situation for Nazi Germany in general and the Luftwaffe in particular would be grim indeed.

SOVIET PREPARATIONS

On the other side of the frontier, Joseph Stalin, the general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, had become the official chief of the Soviet government on May 1941, when he made himself chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. Several agencies were subordinate to this body, including the Defense Committee of the Council of People's Commissars, the People's Commissariat of Defense, under Marshal Semen Timoshenko, and the People's Commissariat of the Navy. The Soviet Union had no separate air force.

Subordinate to the Defense Commissariat was the General Staff (Marshal Georgi Zhukov), which was responsible for war plans. In the event of a general war, it intended to establish a general headquarters, the *Stavka* (staff), which would direct the war effort of the Soviet military forces. The highest army field commands before the outbreak of hostilities were the 16 military districts. The day Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, five became fronts (army groups), and others were converted shortly thereafter.

Soviet military command functions at all levels were complicated by political surveillance. Political commissars were posted to every staff down to the regimental level, and *politruks* (political leadership officers) extended down to platoon level. The commissars, looking over the commanders' shoulders, had the authority to review every decision and could revoke them if they felt so inclined. They were also trained to see sabotage in every reversal and treason in every retreat, no matter how necessary it might be. In addition, the commanders had to deal with the secret police of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), which had authority over state security and maintained surveillance over officers and men in the armed forces. It also had troops of its own, which often formed blocking detachments and were used to halt or prevent retreats. They could pass summary judgments on anyone and were authorized to carry out executions. The Commissars, the NKVD, and other agencies provided Stalin with a constant stream of information outside military channels concerning the actions, behavior, and attitudes of his officers.

At the beginning of 1941, the leadership of the Red Army was in considerable disarray. During the Stalinist purges of 1937 and 1938, it had lost all 11 of its deputy commissars for defense, all of its military

district commanders, 13 of its 15 army commanders, 57 of its 85 corps commanders, 111 of 195 division commanders, 220 of its 406 brigade commanders, and half of its regimental commanders—almost all executed. The Officers' Corps had only just begun to recover from Stalin's rash and drastic actions, and the Soviet armed forces would continue to be handicapped by a lack of competent officers throughout the war.

It suffered from no such shortages in the realm of equipment. ''[I]n strictly numerical terms, the Soviet forces may actually have been the best equipped in the world at that time,'' the U.S. Official History records.[19] According to Stalin, the Soviet Union had 24,000 tanks when the war broke out. Military aircraft production totaled 17,745 airplanes between January 1, 1939, and June 1941, a figure that far exceeded the German total. In addition, the army had 67,335 artillery pieces and mortars (larger than 50 millimeters) when Barbarossa began.

The newest Soviet tanks, the T-34, KV-l, and KV-2, were far superior to anything the Germans had or had even designed. The T-34 was a medium tank of 28 tons (three tons heavier than the heaviest PzKw IV) and had a top speed of 32 mph (eight mph faster than the PzKw IV). The German short-barreled 75-millimeter gun was inferior to the T-34s long-barreled 76-milimeter gun in both range and power. The heavy KV-2 (Kliment Voroshilov-2) weighed 52 tons, and, at 20 mph, was slower than the PzKw IV, but much more heavily armored. Its 76-millimeter gun outgunned the PzKw IV and III. In addition, despite their greater weights, the T-34 and KV-2 had such wide treads that they had as much as 25 percent lower ground pressure per square inch than the German tanks and thus had much better traction and maneuverability in mud and snow. They also featured welded, sloping hulls and turret armor, which made them invulnerable to all but the heaviest German anti-tank weapons.

The new Soviet light tank, the T-60, weighed 6.5 tons, mounted a 20-millimeter main battle gun, and was roughly equal to the PzKw II. It was inferior to either the PzKw III and IV, but it could be built rapidly in ordinary automobile plants, using standard automotive components. In 1940, the Soviets built 2,421 T-60s, 117 T-34s, and 256 KVs. By June 1941, they had constructed 1,225 T-34s and 639 KVs.

The Wehrmacht might have found the Soviet armored forces almost unbeatable had not Russian armored doctrine been so badly flawed. The Soviets dissolved their tank branch as an independent arm in 1939 and its forces were distributed as brigades throughout the infantry armies, much like those of the French Army. Following the victories of the panzer divisions in Poland, France, and the Balkans, the Soviets fanatically tried to reestablish the tank corps, but this process was still in its early stages in the summer of 1941. Also, most of the Soviet tanks did not have radios, but virtually all of the panzers did. As a result,

the Red Army would not be able to duplicate or match the combined arms tactics of the Wehrmacht on the battlefields of 1941.

Like the rest of the Red Army, the Soviet air forces were in a transition process in June 1941. The vast majority of the Soviet aircraft were technologically inferior to their German counterparts at that time. The most modern Soviet airplanes with the squadrons were the Mikoyan-Gurevich (MIG-3), Yakovlev (YAK-1), and Lavochkin-Gorbunov-Goudkov (LAGG) fighters and the Ilyushin (IL-2) dive-bomber, a ground attack aircraft that was slow but heavily armored and difficult to shoot down. The Soviet air units had 2,739 aircraft of these modern designs with their squadrons in 1941. Most of its more than 15,000 airplanes were much older, and many were biplanes. Some of their fighters actually featured gunsights *painted* on their cockpit windshields.

Soviet military preparations were also flawed by an overconcentration of weapons, at the expense of auxiliary and supplementary equipment needed to make the weapons effective. Much of the artillery, for example, depended on ordinary farm tractors as prime movers. The Red Army also lacked radios, trained technical personnel (including signals personnel), and even some of the most basic infantry equipment. During the first German offensive, many Soviet troops tried to dig foxholes with their helmets, because they had no entrenching tools. In short, the Red Army would prove to be a vast, primitive, and cumbersome opponent in the summer of 1941.

PRELUDE TO WAR

Although he had been preparing for a major war at a rapid pace since the mid-1930s, Stalin stubbornly refused to believe that Hitler was planning to invade his country, even after the German buildup on his borders became too large to be concealed. As early as March 20, 1941, Filipp Ivanovich Golikov, the head of the GRU, the military intelligence directorate of the General Staff (and a future marshal of the Soviet Union), presented an intelligence appreciation that spelled out the evidence of the apparent German plan in some detail. By May, he was reporting that more than 100 German divisions were concentrated near the Soviet frontier.

Stalin received warnings from many sources, especially from secret Communist agents and spies in Berlin, Berne, Paris, and other capitals, but also from foreign diplomats. In March, U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull gave Konstantin A. Oumansky, the Soviet Ambassador to Washington, a copy of Hitler's invasion plans. The Americans had obtained it from Sam Edison Woods, the American commercial attaché in Berlin. Woods, who had been in Berlin since 1934, had developed reliable relationships with the secret anti-Nazi underground, and one

of these contacts had given him the plan. Ambassador Oumansky turned pale when he read the document.

The most convincing warning of what was to come, however, came from the most important man in the Soviet secret service, Dr. Richard Sorge. A Berliner by birth, Sorge was a dedicated Communist and, posing as a journalist, carried out successful spy missions in Scandinavia, Great Britain, and China, before being sent to Japan in 1933. In 1941, he was the press assistant at the German Embassy in Tokyo and learned about the impending invasion from the German military attaché. Later, in late 1941, his reports that Japan was not planning to attack the Soviet Union enabled Stalin to shift his Siberian divisions from the Far Eastern Front to the Moscow sector, where they helped turn the tide of the war. On May 12, he informed Moscow that about 150 German divisions would invade the Soviet Union on June 20. Three days later, he revised this report, setting the date as June 22. Sorge's warnings, however, were also ignored.

Washington and London continued to try to warn Stalin throughout the spring of 1941, but he continued to ignore them. The Soviet dictator believed that the Allies were trying to deceive him to provoke him into a confrontation with Hitler, because a war between Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany could only benefit the West. The few measures that the Soviet Union took were precautionary, but by no means extensive. A number of former officers who had survived the purges were released from concentration camps and prisons and returned to active duty. There was a special call-up of 800,000 reservists in the spring of 1941, bringing the strength of the Soviet armed forces to about 5 million men, and 28 divisions (four armies) were moved from the interior to the western frontier. Finally, Stalin concluded a treaty of neutrality with Japan on April 13.[18]

Why Stalin did so little to prepare for the German invasion and allowed the Wehrmacht to achieve tactical surprise over his forces on the frontier is one of the mysteries of World War II. Certainly the indications of an impending invasion were present. There was almost no German shipping in Soviet ports in the late spring of 1941, for example, but Soviet shipping in German ports was being delayed on all kinds of pretexts. The Soviet boundary commission had been expelled from the German side of the Polish frontier and had not been allowed to return. German aerial reconnaissance was violating Soviet airspace on a daily basis, although Stalin had given orders that they should not be fired on, in case Hitler was looking for a provocation. Stalin, however, still would not believe that an invasion was imminent. He put himself in Hitler's place and concluded that, if he were Hitler, he would engage in a war of nerves with the Soviet Union, to frighten it away from the Balkans and Finland, possibly as a prerequisite to

making some new territorial demands of his own. ''Stalin could not bring himself to believe that the Germans would defy all reason and enter into a war on two fronts,'' Colonel Seaton concluded. His mistake was analyzing the situation and drawing conclusions based on his own cold and logical mentality. He did not study Hitler's mentality, which was certainly not cool and logical, and then try to draw conclusions based on the world view of the more passionate Fuehrer. And that is where he went wrong.[20]

While the Soviet intelligence and espionage network formed a clear picture of German intentions and a fair idea of its dispositions, German military intelligence failed disastrously. Two German military organizations were responsible for obtaining data on the Soviet armed forces: Admiral Canaris's Abwehr and O Qu IV, the military intelligence staff of the Army High Command.

O Qu IV was headed by Major General Gerhard Matzky, who, after a tour of duty as military attaché in Tokyo, had become director of army intelligence on January 5, 1941. O Qu IV was divided into two main sections: Foreign Armies West under Lieutenant Colonel Ulrich Liss and Foreign Armies East under Lieutenant Colonel Eberhard Kinzel. These titles are somewhat misleading, since Liss was responsible for gathering information concerning the armies of western Europe exclusively, while Kinzel was responsible for the rest of the world, including Scandinavia, China, Japan, the United States, and South America. Gathering intelligence concerning the Red Army was only a minor part of Kinzel's duties before 1941. Since OKH had not designated the Soviet Union as a major potential target, Kinzel's section devoted little time or money to it. Even less was done in 1939 and 1940, because Hitler had forbidden either the Abwehr or OKH from collecting and evaluating data on the Red Army. Finally, Kinzel was not particularly well qualified for his duties. He was an infantry officer by trade and not an intelligence expert; he had no specialized knowledge of the Soviet Union; and he could not speak Russian.

OKH was not impressed with what little it knew about the Red Army. It had made a poor impression in Poland, an even worse one in Finland, and the military attaché and his deputy, Colonel Hans Krebs, expressed low opinions of it. The Soviets, however, through their police state and totalitarian government, had been successful in blocking the flow of information out of their country. Encouraged by their government, most Soviet citizens were unfriendly to and suspicious of both strangers and foreigns. As a result, the Germans were able to obtain a good idea of the dispositions of Soviet troops in the border zones (thanks to aerial reconnaissance), but had almost no idea of what to expect in the interior. It had almost no knowledge of the Soviet strategic reserves, had no grasp of the extent of Soviet industrial

complex, and no idea of the ability of the Soviet Union's economy to sustain a major war effort.

As a result of all of this, a number of totally erroneous intelligence estimates were made. On July 22, 1940, Halder estimated that the Soviets had 50 to 75 divisions.[21] In August, General Marcks estimated that the Red Army had 151 infantry divisions, 32 cavalry divisions, and 38 motorized brigades, of which 96 infantry divisions, 23 cavalry divisions, and 28 motorized brigades were arrayed against Germany.[22] At the beginning of the campaign, however, OKH estimated that the Red Army had 200 divisions. Within six weeks, it was discovered that it had at least 360.[23] In addition, the German General Staff did not even know the T-34 existed, had never heard of the superheavy KV tanks, and had no knowledge of the terrifying multiple-barrel rocket launchers the soldiers would nickname ''Stalin's pipe organs.'' Their estimate on the number of Soviet tanks was very low. In the mid-1930s, Guderian had been ridiculed by the senior generals for estimating that the Soviets had 10,000 tanks, and General Beck even accused him of exaggerating and spreading alarm. Guderian's estimates were, in fact, conservative. The Soviets had 24,000 tanks available when Operation Barbarossa began and enough industrial capacity to produce 1,000 more each month. German industry only produced 2,800 tanks throughout 1941.[24]

Luftwaffe intelligence estimates were also, as usual, wrong. General Schmid's branch placed the strength of the Red Air Force at 8,000 airplanes, three-quarters of which were in European Russia. Actually, the Soviets had 10,000 aircraft in the western areas alone, and at least 3,000 in the East; furthermore, they were supported by an average production of 1,131 per month.[25] The Luftwaffe commanders had no idea that they were about to take on an enemy that outnumbered them at least seven to one.

NOTES

1. United States Department of the Army, ''The German Campaign in Russia—Planning and Operations (1940–1942),'' United States Department of the Army, Pamphlet 20-261a (1955) (hereafter cited as DA PAM 20-261a).

2. Cooper, *German Army*, p. 263; Halder Diaries, December 5, 1940.

3. Cooper, *German Army*, p. 265.

4. Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, R. H. Barry, trans. (1964; reprint ed., n.d.), p. 139 (hereafter cited as Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*). Warlimont was born in Osnabrueck in 1894 and joined the army as a Fahnenjunker in 1913. He served in the artillery in World War I and became a brigade adjutant. After serving in the Freikorps, he was accepted into the Reichsheer and began his secret General Staff training in 1922. He visited the

United States and England in the interwar years and served in the Spanish Civil War. After commanding the 26th Artillery Regiment in Duesseldorf (1937–38), he was assigned to the staff of OKW and eventually became deputy chief of operations. For future historians, he proved to be a valuable witness to events at Fuehrer Headquarters. Brilliant and arrogant, he was severely wounded during the July 20, 1944, attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler, and was not reemployed. He was sentenced to life imprisonment as a minor war criminal but was released in 1957. He retired to Kreuth, Upper Bavaria, where he died in 1976.

5. Ibid., pp. 168–69.
6. Bethell, p. 26.
7. These were the 104th, 114th, 117th, and 118th Jaeger Divisions.
8. Seaton, *German Army*, p. 160.
9. Koch, *Aspects*, pp. 328–29; Foerster, ''Volkegemeinschaft,'' p. 202
10. Kroener, ''Manpower Shortage,'' p. 294.
11. Foerster, ''Volkegemeinschaft,'' pp. 195–96.
12. Cooper, *GAF*, pp. 173–75; Musciano, p. 42.
13. General a.D. Marquardt, ''Die Stuka-Idee hat der deutsch Luftwaffe den Untergang gebracht,'' in Karlsruhe Document Collection; Hermann Plocher, ''The German Air Force versus Russia, 1941,'' United States Air Force Historical Studies, no. 153, United States Air Force Historical Division, Aerospace Studies Institute, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama (1965) (hereafter cited as Plocher MS, 1941); Hermann Plocher, ''The German Air Force versus Russia, 1942,'' United States Air Force Historical Studies, no. 154, United States Air Force Historical Division, Aerospace Studies Institute, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama (1965) (hereafter cited as Plocher MS, 1942); Hermann Plocher, ''The German Air Force versus Russia, 1943,'' United States Air Force Historical Studies, no. 155, United States Air Force Historical Division, Aerospace Studies Institute, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama (1965) (hereafter cited as Plocher MS, 1943); Irving, *Milch*.
14. Irving, *Milch*.
15. Wood and Gunston.
16. Plocher MS 1942.
17. Irving, *Milch*.
18. Earl F. Ziemke and Magna E. Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (1985), p. 11 (hereafter cited as Ziemke and Bauer).
19. Ibid., p. 99.
20. Seaton, *Russo-German War*, pp. 18–21.
21. Cooper, *German Army*, p. 259; Halder Diaries, July 22, 1940.
22. DA PAM 20-261a.
23. Paul Carell, *Hitler Moves East, 1941–1943* (1965; reprint ed., 1966), p. 53 (hereafter cited as Carell, *Hitler Moves East*).
24. Albert Seaton, *The Battle of Moscow* (1980; reprint ed., 1981).
25. DA PAM 20-261a; R. J. Overy, *The Air War, 1939–1945* (1980), p. 62; Werner Baumbach, *The Life and Death of the Luftwaffe* (1960), p. 62.

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CHAPTER XXXI

OPERATION BARBAROSSA: THE INVASION OF THE SOVIET UNION

Operation Barbarossa took the Soviet defenders in the frontier zones completely by surprise. Only in Colonel General Mikhail P. Kirponos's Kiev Military District was there a degree of readiness. Many of the trucks and tractors used to tow the Soviet guns were away at construction sites or in the fields. The Red Air Force had just completed a series of night training exercises, and its pilots were in bed and their machines short of fuel. Many men were on leave, and several important border fortress units were away from their positions, on field training exercises to the east.

Those who were on the border were taken completely by surprise. At one post on the Bug River, German frontier guards called out the Soviet guards, as if an emergency was taking place. When the unsuspecting Reds came out, the Germans shot them down. Then, all along the border, Soviet positions and installations were rocked by the roar of 6,000 guns—all German. Barracks, supply depots, communications centers, forward headquarters, and military and civilian targets of every description went up in flames. On the western bank of the Bug, engineers began putting down pontoon bridges, while infantrymen and motorcycle troops moved quickly across the river in rubber dinghies and assault boats. At one point, an entire battalion of underwater tanks—originally designed for Operation Sea Lion—crossed the Bug. South of the important fortress of Brest, Geyr's XXIV Panzer Corps bolted across the river, capturing every important bridge in its

sector, overrunning Soviet border guards and the rearguards of retreating troops, and smashing Soviet anti-tank positions. North of Brest, in the zone of the IX Corps, everything also went according to plan. Dinghies and assault boats crossed the river under the cover of artillery fire, and a bridgehead was quickly established. By 9 A.M., a heavy equipment bridge had been completed, and trucks, artillery, and assault guns poured across the river. In fact, along the entire 500-mile length of the Bug, not a single German attack miscarried.

Simultaneous with the ground attack, the Luftwaffe pounced on targets further to the rear and on the Red Air Force. By noon, they had knocked out dozens of Soviet airfields, blasted their fuel dumps, cut their supply lines, pulverized troop units as they attempted to assemble, and destroyed 1,200 Soviet airplanes—800 of them on the ground. They ranged as far east as Sevastopol, where they bombed one of the most important Soviet naval bases. The Germans lost only 10 planes.

At the Officers' Club in Minsk, General Dmitry Pavlov, the commander of the Western Military District, was watching a comedy when his intelligence chief arrived and whispered in his ear that the Germans were attacking. Pavlov turned to his deputy and said that the message was some ''nonsense'' about Germans firing along the border. He continued watching the play.[1]

When the Soviet generals were finally jolted into reality, they found themselves hamstrung by orders from Moscow. Timoshenko told General Bolden, ''No actions must be taken against the Germans without our consent. Comrade Stalin has forbidden our artillery to open fire.''

''It's not possible,'' Boldin shouted into the receiver. ''Our troops are retreating. Whole towns are in flames. Everywhere people are being killed.'' But the order stood.[2]

That morning, Moscow ordered Major General Ivan Ivanovich Kopets to bomb the enemy. He knew that his slow Ilyushin and Tupolev bombers, unescorted by fighters, would have little chance against the Messerschmitts, but he did as he was told. Almost every Soviet general tried to carry out his orders, many of which were ridiculous, because the memory of Stalin's Great Purge was still fresh on everyone's mind, and there was a suspicious Commissar looking over every general's shoulder. Kopets was right: his aircraft were shot down so easily that Field Marshal Kesselring called it ''infanticide.'' By June 23, Kopets had lost all of his bombers—more than 500 aircraft. Then he killed himself.[3]

Lieutenant General Pavel Rychagov, the commander-in-chief of aviation units, also did as he was told, with equally disastrous results. Within a week he was sentenced to death for treason (that is, for having failed) and was executed without trial.

Meanwhile, back in Moscow, Defense Commissar Semen Timoshenko had no idea what was happening at the front. Generals, who

knew that Stalin equated failure with treason, were afraid to report the truth to the Kremlin, and even General Zhukov thought that the situation was developing favorably. Timoshenko therefore ordered a general counterattack. Colonel General Kirponos's armies were ordered to surround and destroy the German forces that had attacked them and to push on to Lublin, a Polish city well behind German lines, within two days. Kirponos knew that this order was crazy; some of his divisions had disappeared entirely, communications were down, the Red Army was in complete disarray, and the Germans had broken through in several places. His political commissar, however, was Nikolai N. Vashugin, who had played a major role in the Great Purge. Vashugin told him to carry out his order. Noting the commissar's threatening tone, Kirponos nodded and attempted to do so. The counterattack was unsuccessful, robbed Kirponos of much of his reserve, and was very costly in terms of Russian lives.

During the first two months of Operation Barbarossa, the Luftwaffe was successful everywhere it struck. German bomber units flew up to six missions a day in the first few days of the campaign, while dive-bombers and fighters flew up to eight missions, depending on the distance from their forward airfields to their targets. The German pilots were amazingly successful in their attempts at establishing aerial supremacy from the outset. ''It was like shooting ducks,'' Colonel Johannes Steinhoff recalled.[4] This sense of individual superiority over the Russian pilot remained with the German aviator throughout the war. ''The German pilot gained and retained the ascendancy over his Russian counterpart mainly because of his superior ego factor,'' Constable and Toliver wrote.

> All the qualities of individual intelligence, independence initiative, and enterprise which fitted him temperamentally for the highly individualized art of aerial combat were encouraged and developed in his training. The Soviet system with its leveling tendencies and opposition to individualism was less than an ideal environment in which to breed fighter pilots. Even as the Russians got steadily better with the passage of time, the individual German fighter pilot never lost the inner conviction that he was a better man than his foes.... The capacity of the German fighter pilots to sustain themselves in the air under such adverse conditions show that what a fighter pilot thinks of himself will manifest itself in what he achieves.[5]

In the zone of General of Fliers Helmuth Foerster's I Air Corps alone, German pilots attacked 77 Soviet airfields in 1,600 sorties during the first three days of the campaign. The I Air Corps shot down 400 enemy airplanes and destroyed another 1,100 on the ground. By August 23, it had shot down 920 enemy airplanes and destroyed 1,594 more on the ground, a total of 2,514 Soviet airplanes destroyed—more than three times the number of aircraft in the entire 1st Air Fleet.

This success was matched all along the front. Kesselring's 2nd Air Fleet virtually wiped out the Red Air Force in the central combat zone within 48 hours of the beginning of the invasion. Kesselring claimed to have destroyed 2,500 Soviet airplanes during the first week of the campaign. Hermann Goering did not believe this claim, so he ordered an investigation to determine whether Kesselring had inflated the size of his victory. The investigators reported that Kesselring had underestimated the number of airplanes his pilots had destroyed by 200 to 300.[6] Goralski wrote that, as of June 24, ''About 2,000 Soviet planes had now been destroyed. In just seventy-two hours the largest air force in the world had been reduced to an ineffectual remnant.''[7] On June 29, at the end of the first week of the campaign, OKW reported the destruction of 4,017 enemy aircraft, at a cost of 150 German airplanes destroyed or heavily damaged—a ratio of 27 to 1.[8]

By June 24, with most of the Red Air Forces smashed, the Luftwaffe turned almost all of its attention to direct and indirect support missions for the army. In these types of operations, Wolfram von Richthofen excelled. On June 24, the Army's VIII and XX Corps of Strauss's 9th Army came under heavy tank and cavalry attack near Bialystok and Lunna. Richthofen committed his entire corps to their aid and destroyed 105 tanks by nightfall. Throughout the campaign of 1941, the Luftwaffe—and especially the Stukas of VIII Air Corps—continued to support the army in an outstanding manner. The ''flying artillery'' destroyed command posts, tanks, bunkers, smashed troop concentrations, and caused all manner of destruction to the Red armies and the Soviet war machine.

Unfortunately for the Germans, the Luftwaffe bombers did not have the range to disrupt rail traffic east of the Dnieper. Because the Third Reich had no strategic air forces, Soviet engineers were able to hastily dismantle every possible piece of industrial machinery and send it east, where it would be reassembled in the Urals or beyond. In all, nearly 300 industrial complexes were evacuated from the Ukraine alone, along with nearly 150 smaller factories. Almost 500 factories were transferred from the Moscow area to the east. In all, some 1,300 large plants were shipped east, a move requiring 6.5 million railroad cars. Although dislocated and badly hurt, the industrial potential of the Soviet Union had not been destroyed; if the blitzkrieg did not conquer the U.S.S.R. before the onset of winter, Russia, with a population almost three times that of Germany, would be able to recover.

For the Germans, the first unpleasant surprise of the campaign came on the night of June 23, on the left wing of the 4th Panzer Group, in the zone of Army Group North. Here, east of the Lithuanian village of Rossizny (Raseiniai), the 1st and 6th Panzer Divisions of Georg-Hans Reinhardt's XXXXI Panzer Corps came under heavy attack from the

Soviet 3rd Armored Corps, which was equipped mainly with KV-1 and KV-2 tanks, which weighed 43 and 52 tons, respectively. The KV-2, in fact, weighed twice as much as the heaviest German tank. ''[A]ll armored-piercing shells simply bounced off them,'' the 1st Panzer reported. One KV-2 was hit more than 70 times by German anti-tank fire, but not a single round pierced the armor. The anti-tank gunners soon took to aiming at their tracks, hoping to immobilize them, and then finish them off with artillery or anti-aircraft guns, or blow them up at close range with HE devices. Fortunately, the Soviets showed no tactical skill or understanding of combined-arms methods and merely launched repeated frontal attacks. The battle was not decided until June 26, when the more experienced Germans (now reinforced with the 36th Motorized and 269th Infantry Divisions) launched a flank attack, drove them into a swamp, and smashed the 3rd Armored. The Reds lost 200 tanks in this battle.[9]

On Reinhardt's right flank, General Erich von Manstein's LVI Panzer Corps did not face such determined opposition. Even resistance from Soviet tank units was ineffective because, as was the case along most of the front, they had been supplied with HE ammunition (good for close support missions against infantry) and not armor-piercing, anti-tank shells. His spearhead, Major General Erich Brandenberger's 8th Panzer Division, broke through quickly and drove toward Daugavpils, scattering the Russians as it went. In four days, it covered more than 200 miles, and on the morning of June 26, captured its first important objectives of the campaign: the road and railroad bridges over the Dvina River at Daugavpils.

Manstein wanted to continue the pursuit while the Soviets were still off balance. ''The safety of an armored formation in the enemy's rear depends on its continued movement,'' was an adage coined by Manstein.[10] Hitler, however, was getting jittery again and was afraid of his own success. He ordered LVI Corps to halt and await the arrival of the left wing of the 16th Army, which was more than 60 miles back.

Manstein, whose corps already posed a threat to Leningrad, was quite displeased with this order. He realized that speed was of the essence, and the entire concept of Barbarossa demanded that a breakthrough and a rapid advance be maintained. But orders were orders, and he obeyed them.

The LVI Panzer Corps, which had gained 200 miles in four days and was only 300 miles from Leningrad, sat still for six days. During that time, General Kuznetsov drew all of his forces back to the old Stalin Line, on the former Russian-Estonian frontier, between Lake Peipus and Sebezh, and threw the 21st Mechanized Corps into a counterattack against Daugavpils. Manstein quickly defeated the Soviet attack but, when he at last received permission to advance again on July 2, he

found that his opponent was no longer a beaten mass of men on the run; he was organized, prepared, and much more difficult to deal with. Leningrad was much farther away than it had been on June 26th.

This battle and the subsequent delay highlights once of the principle features of the Soviet soldiers and High Command during the entire war. Whenever they were surprised by a swift and powerful blow, even if it was delivered by a numerically inferior foe, the cumbersome and inflexible Soviet command would be seized with paralysis. However, when they were given time to organize and prepare a resistance, they would resist fiercely, even if they knew that they were deliberately being sacrificed.

AUFTRAGSTAKTIK AND THE FIRST BATTLE OF ENCIRCLEMENT

On the ground, the German Army in Russia was outnumbered from the beginning. On June 22, it struck the Soviet Union with 146 divisions: 3 million men, 600,000 vehicles, 750,000 horses, and 3,580 armored vehicles. They were met in the frontier zones by 139 Soviet divisions, 29 independent brigades, and several independent tank and mechanized corps—a total of 4.7 million men.[11] Yet the Germans seized and maintained the initiative in every sector. Unlike the Russian officers, the German commanders and NCOs had been trained to exercise personal initiative and to think for themselves when orders from above were lacking. ''[T]he German higher commander rarely or never reproached their subordinate unless they made a terrible blunder,'' General Balck recalled.

> They left him room for initiative and did not reprimand him unless he did something very wrong. This went down to the individual soldier, who was praised for developing initiative. Of course there were exceptions, but generally independent action along the line of the general concept was praised and was accepted as something good.[12]

The Germans called this mission-oriented tactical doctrine *Auftragstaktik*, and it was superior to the tactical doctrine of the Soviets—and to the order-oriented tactical doctrine that the Fuehrer later forced on the Wehrmacht—in every respect. The first major ground battle of the campaign was the Battle of Bialystok-Minsk, which was fought in the zone of Fedor von Bock's Army Group Center, and it is a good example of Auftragstaktik. It consisted of two double envelopments. The deeper envelopment was directed against Minsk, the capital of Belorussia, which was 170 miles in the Soviet rear. Bock planned for Hoth's 3rd Panzer Group to attack it from the north, while Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group enveloped it

from the south. Simultaneously, the shorter double envelopment would take place to the west. It focused on the Bialystok salient, with the infantry of Strauss's 9th Army attacking from the north and von Kluge's 4th Army advancing from the south. When the encircled Soviet forces were destroyed, Bock planned yet another double envelopment, this time against Smolensk, using the 3rd and 2nd Panzer Groups. This encirclement would advance the German front yet another 150 miles to the east, across the Dnieper River, and well over halfway to Moscow.

It should be noted here that there was a tremendous amount of rivalry and ill-feeling between the senior members of the German armed forces, and Army Group Center provides a prime example of this phenomena. The most prominent characteristic that distinguished the cold, humorless, and arrogant Bock, for example, was his overwhelming ambition. He did not like Brauchitsch, apparently because he felt he should have been named commander-in-chief of the army in 1938, instead of Brauchitsch, who had been junior to him in seniority at the time. Bock, who was stubborn and intolerant, had also developed bad relations with Kluge, Strauss, and especially Guderian, who was equally intolerant and had a running feud with most of the senior generals in the army. Bock, Halder, and Brauchitsch all disliked Jodl, whom they considered an interloper, and the commander-in-chief of OKH and his chief of staff deliberately excluded him from army planning; and, of course, everyone considered Keitel a blockhead, including Hitler himself. In addition, Halder considered Brauchitsch a gutless wonder, and their relationship was quite cool. Of the senior generals of Army Group Center, only the calm, level-headed, and highly professional General Hoth seemed to maintain a correct relationship with everybody—which is a tremendous compliment to his diplomatic balm. In view of all of these personality disputes, the successes that Field Marshal von Bock achieved during the opening stages of the Russian campaign are nothing short of remarkable and were achieved only because he did not interfere in the tactical affairs of his subordinates—and did not let anyone else interfere with them, either.

As the infantry of the 9th and 4th Armies converged on Bialystok from the north and south, General Dmitri Pavlov, the commander of the Soviet West Front, moved his remaining reserves from the Minsk area west, to attack the German infantry. Apparently, he was unaware that an even greater danger existed in the rapidly moving panzer columns, north and south of Minsk. The Soviet reserves were quickly engaged in heavy fighting against the infantry of Kluge and Strauss, while Hoth and Guderian pushed well east of Bialystok with their tanks and motorized formations.

At this point, Hitler panicked. On June 25, only three days into the war, he began to interfere in the tactical business of his generals;

bypassing Brauchitsch, he ordered von Bock to abandon the Minsk encirclement, in favor of a much shorter one. Bock fiercely objected to this change with every argument he could muster, and this time Hitler gave way. The result was a tremendous victory for the Germans. The 3rd and 2nd Panzer Groups continued to push east, against scattered resistance. Then, suddenly, Hoth's columns turned abruptly south, while Guderian's broke to the north; both converged on Minsk, a city of a million people, which was now virtually undefended. The Belorussian capital fell on June 28, the same day that Strauss and Kluge closed the jaws on Bialystok. The next day, Hoth's vanguard linked up with Guderian's spearhead, forming a giant double pocket, trapping three Russian armies and parts of two others—40 divisions in all. The Russians made several uncoordinated attempts to break out of the pockets, and a few units did manage to escape through the deep forests of Belorussia. The 29th Motorized, 18th Motorized, and 19th Panzer Divisions kept the Minsk Pocket sealed until Bock could replace them with infantry units from the 4th and 9th Armies. The pockets were finally cleared on July 3. Bock's forces took 290,000 prisoners and destroyed or captured 3,332 Soviet tanks and 1,809 pieces of artillery. Two Soviet armies had been totally destroyed, along with most of three others. Stalin had lost 22 infantry divisions and the equivalent of seven tank divisions and six mechanized brigades, as well as a province containing almost 10 million citizens. On June 29, even before this battle was over, Guderian ordered Major General Walter Nehring, the commander of the 18th Panzer Division, to drive south of Minsk and head east, toward Borisov on the Berezina River, to form a bridgehead there. The division would be alone, 60 miles behind enemy lines. It jumped off on June 30. The bridge, which the defenders had not been authorized to blow up, was captured the next day. Fifty miles farther south, Lieutenant General Walter Model's 3rd Panzer Division had already crossed the Berezina at Bobruysk, and, still farther south, 4th Panzer Division also crossed the river and headed for Mogilev.

General Pavlov himself escaped the Minsk encirclement and was summoned to Moscow, where he was promptly arrested, court-martialed and shot, along with his chief of staff and several of his top advisors. His political commissar was not punished. Marshal Timoshenko, the commissar of defense, personally assumed command of the West Front and Marshal Semen Budenny's Reserve Front (four armies) on July 2, but could do nothing to halt the panzers on the Berezina, which had already been penetrated in a number of places. He dug in on the line of the upper Dvina and upper Dnieper and awaited the panzer onslaught.

Guderian's spearheads reached the Dnieper the next day. They were already 320 miles inside the Soviet Union, and had already covered about half of the distance to Moscow.

STIFFENING RESISTANCE AND SLOWER PROGRESS

Meanwhile, Soviet resistance stiffened. There were a number of reasons for this, and Hitler himself is to blame for much of the opposition. Thousands of men, including commissars, Jewish soldiers, officers, and others, knew that they had nothing to gain by surrendering. Stories of German atrocities spread rapidly throughout the Red Army from the first day of the invasion. Many of them were not true, but all too many of them were completely accurate. By the end of the first week of the war, SS Lieutenant General Otto Ohlendorf's *Einsatzgruppe* was already at work in Belorussia, which had a large Jewish population. Even by Nazi standards, the murders here were indiscriminate. One day in Minsk, for example, the SS men hauled 280 prisoners out of the Minsk jail, lined them up in a ditch, and shot them all. Then, since the ditch was not yet full, they went back to the jail, brought out 30 more, and shot them, too. It was discovered later that this second group included 23 skilled workers who had come from Poland as German employees. They had been billeted in the jail only because there was a housing shortage in war-torn Minsk.

Naturally stories about atrocities of this nature, often embellished in the telling, spread like wildfire through the Soviet ranks. Commissars and others had little trouble convincing their often illiterate and unsophisticated enlisted men that a horrible fate awaited them if they allowed themselves to be captured by the Germans. Tales of unspeakable torture and unprovoked German cruelty and sadism also made the rounds throughout the Red Army in 1941.

On the heels of the Einsatzgruppen came Hitler's *Reichskommissionaren* and civil administrators selected to rule the occupied lands. These administrators were major contributing factors to Soviet resistance at the front and to the proliferation of partisan bands behind it.

When the soldiers of the German Army entered the Ukraine, they were greeted as liberators. ''In every village we're showered with bouquets of flowers, even more beautiful ones than we got when he entered Vienna,'' one soldier wrote in June 1941. The Ukrainians (and the Poles living in the western Ukraine) disliked the Russians and hated the Communists, who had closed down their churches and murdered their upper class. The villagers and peasants greeted the troops in their native costumes, carrying bread and salt (the traditional Ukrainian welcome for honored guests), serenaded them with balalaika music, offered them food and drink, and erected arches bearing such slogans as, ''The Ukrainian peoples thank their liberators, the brave German Army. Heil Adolf Hitler!''[13]

That was before they met Erich Koch, the new Reichskommissionar for the Ukraine. Koch, a former railroad clerk from the Rhineland and

a close friend of the insidious Martin Bormann (now Hitler's principle advisor), had been appointed Gauleiter of East Prussia in 1928, on the recommendation of Julius Streicher, the notorious Jew-baiter. He was already known for his ruthlessness, sadism, and corruption. Koch's first official act upon taking charge of the Ukraine was to close the local schools, declaring that ''Ukraine children need no schools. What they'll have to learn later will be taught to them by their German masters.''[14] He quickly destroyed or plundered several Ukrainian museums and libraries, including every university library as well as the library of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences at Kiev. The Gauleiter made it clear to everyone that he had nothing but contempt for Slavic *Untermenschen* (subhumans) and, in his inaugural speech, told his subordinates:

> Gentlemen: I am known as a brutal dog. Because of this reason I was appointed Reichskommissar of the Ukraine. Our task is to suck from the Ukraine all the goods we can get hold of, without consideration of the feeling or property of the Ukrainians. Gentlemen: I am expecting from you the utmost severity toward the native population.[15]

Later he declared, ''We are a master race, which must remember that the lowliest German worker is racially and biologically a thousand times more valuable than the population here.''[16] As if to emphasize the point that the Ukrainians would have no say in the governing of the Ukraine, Koch drove thousands of villagers out of the Zuman district, which he converted into a 175,000-acre private hunting estate for himself.

Koch agreed with Goering that ''[t]he best thing would be to kill all men in the Ukraine over fifteen years of age, and then to send in the SS stallions.''[17] He soon made an informal deal with the Reichsmarschall and Himmler, whereby the SS would be given a free hand in its extermination program, in return for the allocation of economic resources and ''general loot'' to Goering.[18] Both, in turn, would support Koch against his archenemy, Alfred Rosenberg, the head of the Eastern Ministry. They made an effective unholy triumvirate. Koch's particular forte was to have prisoners whipped to death in public squares or parks, to encourage the Ukrainians to be obedient. Naturally, such acts had the reverse affect. Due to his policies of repression, ''Germanization,'' murder, and exploitation, his region was soon infested with partisans. Koch's contempt extended to the German Army, which, in turn, refused to protect his hunting lodge from guerillas, who eventually burned it down; in fact, in September 1942, a gunman fired at Koch, but missed, and then made good his escape—in an army Mercedes. Koch was later charged with responsibility for murdering 400,000 Poles, as well as tens of thousands of Jews and Ukrainians.

Wilhelm Kube, the Landeskommissar of Belorussia, was another of the infamous Nazi administrators who wielded vast power in the newly conquered territories. He had been a Nazi member of the Reichstag and a civil servant in West Prussia but had been ''retired'' because of his scandalous behavior. In Belorussia, he was delighted to find high-quality vodka, beer, and attractive, blonde-haired, blue-eyed female peasants, whom he called ''blondies'' and incorporated into his domestic service, which soon became a harem. His administrative staff, one author wrote, consisted of ''woefully unprepared personnel.... Nazi waiters and diary men, yesterday's clerks and superintendents, graduates of quick training courses ... dizzy with power, yet quite unfit for their jobs.... In practice Kube's instructions were often disregarded by his subordinates.''[19]

Kube's administration of Belorussia (White Russia) was, needless to say, a disaster, but he continued to amuse himself with his harem and alcohol until September 1942. Then, he went to bed, only to find that one of his ''blondies'' had put an antipersonnel mine under his hot water bottle. It blew off both of his legs and he died within a half an hour. Kube was succeeded by SS Major General (later SS Lieutenant General) Kurt von Gottberg, whose rule was considerably harsher than Kube's. Naturally, neither were able to ''win the hearts and minds'' of the Belorussian people, and the region was soon heavily infested with partisans.

In addition to the blunders of the Nazis, patriotism also played a part in the increasingly stiff Russian resistance. Many of the Soviet peasants fought out of a simple love for Mother Russia. Communist propaganda played on this theme skillfully, which helped rally the troops at the front, increase industrial production in the rear, and begin partisan movements in the German communications zones. Ihor Kamenetsky recalled,

> The tradition of military glory was symbolized not by the heroes of the Russian Revolution or of International Communism but by such old Russian ''bourgeois'' and ''reactionary'' national heroes as Czar Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, General Kutusov, etc. By reviving Russian nationalism and pretending to be a savior of ''Holy Russia,'' the Soviet government grasped one of the main assets of its survival, and it used this asset with a great skill in the time to come.[20]

Finally, fear of their Communist masters was a major motivating factor in the increasingly fanatical Soviet resistance. Soviet soldiers who were captured were declared traitors for allowing themselves to be taken alive. Even a Russian prisoner who escaped and made it back to his own lines could expect nothing but a prison sentence—or worse.

The fact that families of prisoners of war had their food rations taken away—which often meant they starved to death—further inspired the Russian soldier to fight to the end. ''There are no prisoners of war, there are traitors,'' Stalin declared. When Stalin's eldest son, Yakov Djugashvili, was captured in July 1941, the dictator had Yakov's wife, Yulia, thrown into prison for two years. Even when Hitler offered to trade Yakov for one of his nephews who had been captured at the front, Stalin refused to make the swap. Yakov was killed by the SS on April 14, 1943, when he deliberately crossed a ''death line'' at Sacksenhausen. According to the sentry who shot him, Yakov grabbed the perimeter wire and yelled at him, ''Hey, you are a soldier, so don't be a coward. Shoot me!'' He died instantly.[21]

Such brutality from the top permeated the Soviet armed forces and citizenry with fear from top to bottom, thanks largely to the Commissars, the politruks, the Narodnyy Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del (The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs or The Secret Police) (NKVD), and the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (The Committee for State Security, the premier security agency and intelligence bureau of the U.S.S.R.) (KGB), and many other agencies that flourished in the ruthless totalitarian system that was the Soviet Union.

Russian patriotism, Nazi atrocities, and Stalin's brutal police state methods were not the major factors in slowing the German advance. In early July 1941, the Soviet transportation system was a major drawback to the Wehrmacht. In 1941, the Soviet Union had 850,000 miles of ''roads,'' but 700,000 of them were little more than cart tracks. Only 150,000 were classified as all weather, and only 40,000 miles were paved.[22] Even the major roads were dirt, and the dust was tremendous. The infantry marched behind the panzers, often covering 30 miles a day, becoming harder and more physically fit each week. As their stamina improved as the brutal summer sun beat down upon them, hotter and hotter every day, as their uniforms became more and more infested with dirt, vermin, and lice, the morale of German infantry actually improved, the deeper they advanced into Soviet Russia. By July 1941, morale was higher than it had ever been.

Panzer units were another matter. Unlike the infantry, with its horse-drawn supply wagons, they needed more than just rations and a few rounds of light ammunition. They required fuel, maintenance, oil, grease, and spare parts of every kind. The dirt roads of the Soviet Union soon turned to dust under the heavy treads of the tanks, and it clogged the engines and caused the moving parts of the panzers to wear quickly. The supply units had a difficult time keeping up, even in good weather. As a result, spare parts could not reach the maintenance units quickly enough or in sufficient quantities, and the German tanks and trucks were soon breaking down faster than their motor

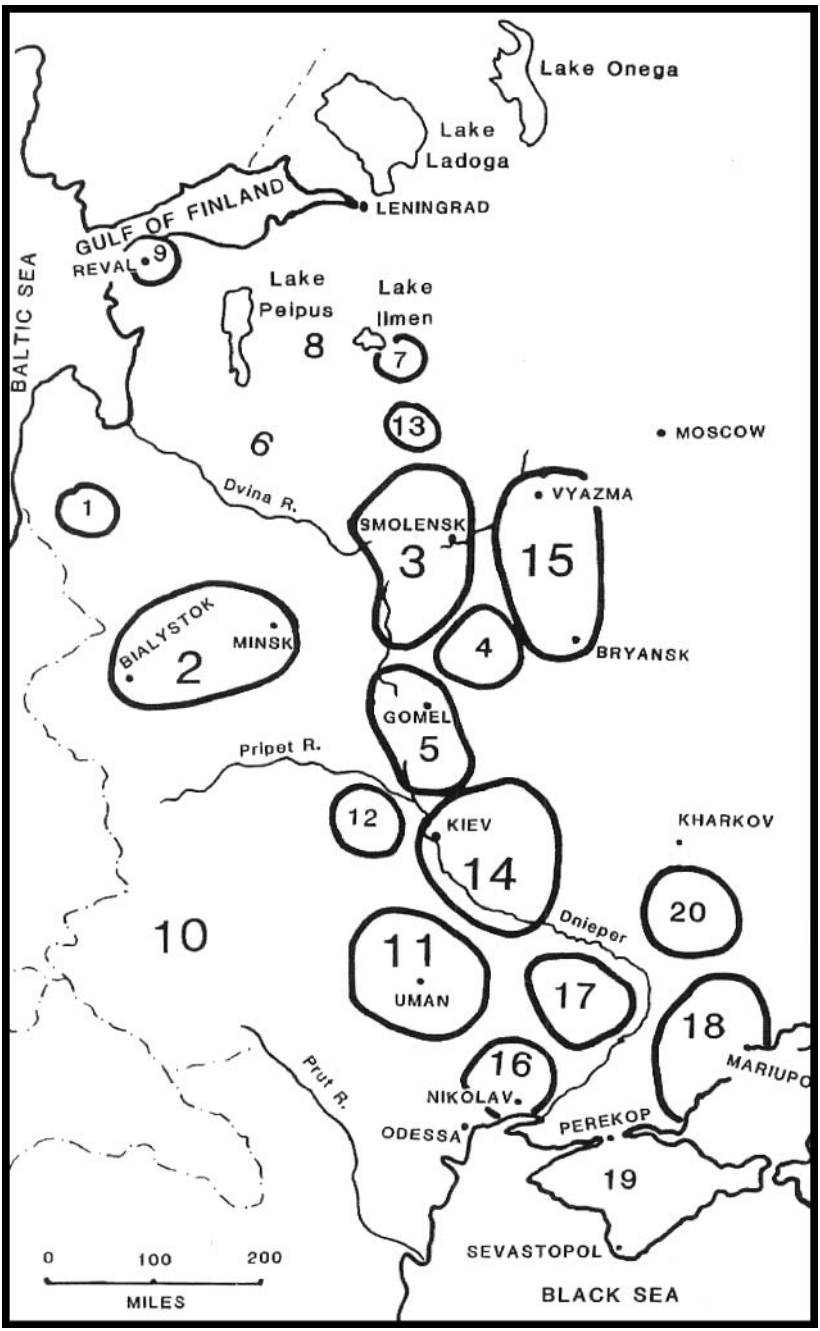
pools could repair them. The combat strengths of the German motorized and panzer divisions began to fall dramatically. By early August, 30 percent of the German motor vehicles had broken down and were awaiting repair, and casualties and mechanical breakdowns had reduced the army's tank strength to less than 50 percent of its establishment. By the end of August, 4th Panzer Group had only 70 percent of its authorized number of operational tanks—and it was in better condition than any other group in the east. Kleist's 1st Panzer Group was at 53 percent of its authorized strength, and 3rd Panzer Group was at 41 percent. Only one-quarter of Guderian's tanks were still operational.[23]

THE BATTLE OF THE SMOLENSK POCKET

Despite their problems, Hitler's panzer spearhead continued to advance on the central sector of the Russian Front. By July 10, they had already covered half of the distance to Moscow, but resistance was stiffening and progress was becoming more difficult. At Hitler's personal orders, and over the objections of Field Marshal von Bock, Army Group Center was reorganized. The 2nd and 3rd Panzer Groups were placed under the command of Kluge's 4th Army, which was temporarily and unofficially dubbed 4th Panzer Army, for the advance on Smolensk. Weichs's 2nd Army Headquarters, now up from Yugoslavia, took over the infantry divisions that had previously belonged to 4th Army.

The new command arrangement was not a good one, because Kluge did not have much talent for leading panzer armies. For example, he wanted to advance on a broad front, which merely pushed the Soviet armies east, instead of destroying them by encirclement. The plan to encircle Smolensk was devised by Guderian and Hoth, behind Kluge's back. Guderian, of course, was harsh in his criticism of Kluge, whom he hated, but the more level-headed and objective Hoth also described Kluge's advance as a showpiece on how not to conduct armored warfare.[24] Hoth's advance toward Smolensk was relatively slow, partially due to Kluge, partially due to Hitler, partially due to stiffening Soviet resistance, and partially due to heavy summer rains turning the dirt roads into bogs. He advanced on the city from the north, but was held up by heavy Russian flanking attacks. On the southern flank of the envelopment, however, Guderian advanced much more rapidly. He crossed the Dnieper on July 10 and 11, secured two bridgeheads, and then quickly drove on Smolensk, shoving the Soviet 13th Army before him, and encircling four rifle divisions and part of the 20th Mechanized Corps near Mogilev on the 12th. Hoth, meanwhile, captured

Figure 31.1
The Battles of Encirclement on the Eastern Front, 1941



THE BATTLES OF ENCIRCLEMENT OF THE EASTERN FRONT, 1941

1. **Rossizny**: 200 tanks
2. **Bialystok-Minsk**: 290,000 captured, 3,332 tanks, 1809 guns
3. **Smolensk**: 310,000 men, 3,205 tanks, 3,120 guns
4. **Roslavl**: 38,000 men, 250 tanks, 359 guns
5. **Gomel**: 84,000 men, 144 tanks, 848 guns
6. **Divina**: 35,000 men, 355 tanks, 655 guns
7. **Staraya Russa**: 53,000 men, 320 tanks, 695 guns
8. **Luga**: 250,000 men, 1,170 tanks 3,075 guns
9. **Reval**: 12,000 men, 91, tanks, 293 guns
10. **Galacia**: 150,000 men, 1,970 tanks, 2,190 guns
11. **Uman**: 103,000 men, 317 tanks, 1,100 guns
12. **Zhitomir**: 18,000 men, 142 tanks, 123 guns
13. **Valdai Hills**: 30,000 men, 400 guns
14. **Kiev**: 667,000 men, 884 tanks, 3,718 guns
15. **Vyazma-Bryansk**: 663,000 men, 1,242 tanks, 5,412 guns
16. **Nikolav**: 60,000 men, 84 tanks, 1,100 guns
17. **Dnieper Bend**: 84,000 men, 199 tanks, 465 guns
18. **Mariupol (Sea of Azov)**: 106,000 men, 212 tanks, 672 guns
19. **Crimea**: 100,000 men, 160 tanks, 700 guns
20. **The Donetz**: 14,000 men, 45 tanks, 69 guns

Note: Soviet losses in men refers to those captured only; losses in tanks and guns refer to those captured or destroyed.

Yartsevo, a cotton milling city, on July 15, at the same time Guderian's 29th Motorized Division took Smolensk. To the astonishment of General Halder, the two joined hands the following day, trapping the Soviet 20th and 16th Armies, and forming another large pocket. This did not end the battle, because the Soviets launched repeated breakout attempts, which were fierce but uncoordinated, and Timoshenko made several attacks designed to relieve the pocket from the east. Against Hoth's forces alone he threw three armies, but without success. To the south, the Soviet 28th Army struck from the important communications center of Roslavl against 2nd Panzer Group and made some progress until it fell into a Guderian trap and was surrounded by XXIV Panzer and VII Corps. Figure 31.1 shows the pockets at Smolensk and Roslavl, as well as the other battles of encirclement on the Eastern Front, where the Red Army of 1941 was devastated.

The Battle of the Smolensk Pocket ended on August 5, when the last resistance was crushed. About 310,000 Soviet soldiers were captured, and 3,205 tanks and 3,120 guns captured or destroyed. Three days later, the Battle of the Roslavl Pocket ended. Guderian took another

38,000 prisoners, along with 250 tanks and 359 guns, captured or destroyed.[25]

As soon as the Battle of the Smolensk Pocket was over, Guderian hurled the XXIV Panzer Corps into the Russian rear, west and north of Gomel, in coordination with von Weichs's 2nd Army, which attacked from the east. By the time the battle of the Gomel Pocket was over on August 24, two more Russian armies were gone and another 84,000 prisoners had been captured, along with 144 tanks and 848 guns.[26]

By the first of September, Field Marshal von Bock's Army Group Center had carried out its initial mission brilliantly. From June 22 to the end of August, it had inflicted more than three-quarters of a million casualties on the Russians and had destroyed several Soviet armies, captured more than 600,000 men, and destroyed or captured some 7,000 Soviet tanks and more than 6,000 guns. In the meantime, it had suffered fewer than 100,000 casualties. More important, it had advanced more than 500 miles, was well beyond the Dnieper, and was only about 185 miles from Moscow at its closest point.

The Communists feverishly dug in and prepared to defend their capital, but Fedor von Bock was absolutely confident that he could brush these remnants aside and be in Moscow within a month. His optimism was shared by Hoth, Guderian, Halder, and most of the other German commanders. There is, in fact, little question that he could have done just that, had he been given permission to do so. Hitler, however, was not much interested. On August 4, he gave his orders for the next phase of the campaign. Hoth's 3rd Panzer Group was to turn north, to join Army Group North in the capture of Leningrad; simultaneously, Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group was to turn south, to assist Rundstedt's Army Group South in the conquest of the Ukraine and the capture of Kiev. This order had the effect of stripping Bock's army group of four of its five panzer corps. Richthofen's VIII Air Corps, which had provided Bock with excellent air cover, was also transferred to the north.

THE DRIVE TO LENINGRAD

While Bock was crushing his opponents in the massive double envelopments of Bialystok, Minsk, and Smolensk, Field Marshal Ritter von Leeb's Army Group North was having a more difficult time in the Baltic States. His problems in this campaign were mammoth. The terrain was flat, thickly forested, and sandy, with much marshland and many swamps. Like Bock, his objectives were unclear. He had been ordered to capture the Baltic States and seize Leningrad, but no priority had been assigned to these assignments. Was he suppose to clear the

Baltic States first or take Leningrad and then mop up the Baltic States? He still had not received an answer when the campaign began. Finally, Leeb himself was a defensive expert; he was neither trained nor suited for directing large mobile formations, which he handled here for the first time in his long career. His senior tank commander, Hoepner, was a capable panzer leader but independent minded and difficult to direct. Friction soon developed between them, because Hoepner considered Leeb too slow, and Leeb became nervous when the advances of the panzer generals, in keeping with their standard tactics, put them dozens of miles ahead of the infantry, with nothing in reserve to cover their rear.

Leeb attacked into the Soviet Union at 3:15 A.M. on June 22, with Kuechler's 18th Army on the left, Hoepner's 4th Panzer Group in the center, and Busch's 16th Army on the right. He was initially faced by General Fedor I. Kuznetsov's Northwest Front, which consisted of some 30 divisions, including two mechanized corps (four armored and two mechanized divisions), as well as a few independent tank brigades. To the Soviet rear lay Markian M. Popov's Leningrad Military District (later North Front), which had another 20 divisions.

Leeb's forces initially advanced rapidly, breached the Dvinsk River line, and won important victories at Daugavpils and Rossizny. Leeb, however, did not object to Hitler's order paralyzing Manstein's LVI Panzer Corps at Daugavpils for almost a week. On July 1, he met with General Hoepner and proposed that 16th Army (on the southern flank of the army group) wheel north and seal off the Baltic States, while 4th Panzer Group protect its eastern flank. Hoepner vigorously objected; he wanted to advance between Lake Peipus and Ilmen, on the direct route to Leningrad, with his entire command. Leeb, therefore, proposed a compromise: Manstein would drive on Novorzhev (in the direction of Lake Ilmen), along with the 16th Army, while Reinhardt's XXXXI Panzer—Hoepner's other corps—advanced on Ostrov, in the direction of Leningrad. Hoepner did not like this plan either, because it was a broad-front approach. The bold General Hoepner favored a narrow, quick-thrust advance on Leningrad, but was overruled by Marshal Leeb.

Leeb continued to push forward on a broad front until July 7, when Brauchitsch appeared at his headquarters and approved Hoepner's plan for an advance on Leningrad: XXXXI Panzer Corps would advance along the Pskov-Luga-Leningrad road, while Manstein's LVI Panzer drove on Novgorod, and then on to Leningrad. These were the only two routes to the capital of the Czars, which meant that the element of surprise would be totally lacking, and the two panzer corps would be separated from each other by more than 100 miles of forests and swampland, and well out in front of the infantry.

Reinhardt began his advance on July 10, but faced stiff resistance and difficult terrain. He was stopped on July 12, after a gain of only a few miles. Two days later, Manstein was attacked by the reinforced Russian 11th Army, and at one point was completely cut off from the rest of the German Wehrmacht. Hoepner, meanwhile, executed a bold move: he sent Manstein's entire command to the north, to turn the flank of the Russian units barring Reinhardt's way. The maneuver worked; by July 17 the Luga position had been overcome and 4th Panzer Group was only 80 miles from Leningrad. Unfortunately, Hitler and OKH became nervous and ordered Hoepner to halt Manstein's corps until the infantry of the 16th Army could come up and secure his right flank. Leeb, who for once favored the bold solution, appealed to OKW, but could not get the order rescinded. He considered letting Reinhardt proceed alone, but did not. The ensuing delay gave the Russians three weeks to rally their forces and prepare their defenses.

Leeb's army group had now advanced 430 miles into Soviet Russia and had cleared most of the Baltic States of Russian forces, but was at the end of a long supply line that was subject to attack by Russian partisans, bypassed units, and stragglers. Also, as one moves east, European Russia opens up like a funnel. Army Group North's frontage increased with every step his men advanced. To add to his problems, Hitler had finally decided that 18th Army must complete the conquest of the Baltic States before attempting to take Leningrad. Finally, the Fuehrer required Busch to cover the left flank of Army Group Center, to the extent that 60 percent of the 16th Army's infantry was engaged in this task by the middle of July. As a result, there were no foot soldiers to spare for 4th Panzer Group, which was exposed to probing attacks by new Russian armies. Leeb's rate of advance, which had averaged 17 miles a day for the first three weeks of the campaign, slowed to barely one mile a day in August.

Hoepner resumed his drive on Leningrad on August 8, with Reinhardt on the left and Manstein on the right. The swampy, forested terrain was utterly unsuited for armor, and Soviet resistance was well-prepared and fierce. Reinhardt's three divisions suffered so many casualties that Hoepner considered abandoning the offensive. Finally, on August 14, Hoepner at last broke out, but Leeb had to take away half of his panzer group almost immediately, because a major crisis had developed to the south.

On August 1, on the left flank of 16th Army, General of Artillery Christian Hansen's X Corps had begun an advance on Staraya Russa, an important transportation center on the southern side of Lake Ilmen, to provide cover for the deep right flank of Army Group North for its final advance on Leningrad. The Soviets were fully ready for this onslaught and committed the entire 11th Army to the defense, behind

deep minefields, dug-in tanks, bunkers, and extensive field fortifications. It took three German infantry divisions a week of heavy fighting to penetrate the last nine miles to Staraya Russa, where they were soon engaged in house-to-house fighting.

On August 12, Soviet Marshal Voroshilov, the latest commander of the Northwest Front, threw his newly activated 34th Army (eight infantry divisions, a tank corps, and a cavalry corps) into an attack on Staraya Russa, with the objective of pinning X Corps against the southern shore of Lake Ilmen and destroying it. On August 15, Leeb had to hurriedly transfer LVI Panzer to the 16th Army to save Hansen and his men. On August 19, after a forced march of more than 100 miles, Manstein hurled his two divisions (the 3rd Motorized and the SS Motorized Division Totenkopf) into the rear of the 34th Army, trapping it between himself and Hansen. By August 23, the Soviet army had been destroyed and 246 guns had been captured. Manstein could not return to the north, however, because Voroshilov threw three more armies into an offensive against the land neck between Lakes Peipus and Ilmen, pinning down both 16th Army and the LVI Panzer Corps in the process.

Meanwhile, in accordance with Hitler's orders, 18th Army was reinforced with Schmidt's XXXIX Panzer Corps (from Army Group Center) and VIII Air Corps. With this help, Kuechler was able to push back the Soviet 48th Army to the north of Lake Ilmen. He took Novgorod and, on August 25, seized Chudovo, on the main Moscow to Leningrad railroad line. The Soviets reinforced this sector to a strength of four armies but were unable to prevent Leeb from taking Mga on August 30. By September 4, the 18th Army had cleared Estonia of Soviet troops, as well as the entire southern shore of the Gulf of Finland, except for a small bridgehead at Oranienbaum, opposite Kronstadt, where the Soviet 8th Army was besieged by Albert Wodrig's XXVI Corps. In the center, Leeb's troops were nearing the suburbs of Leningrad.

This city, the second largest in the Soviet Union, was formerly St. Petersburg, the capital of the Czars. It had a population of 3 million in 1941, contained major munitions plants, tank factories, textile mills, and shipyards, and was the home port of the Soviet Baltic Fleet. It was of major importance to the Soviet war effort, and its fall very well could have endangered the continued existence of the Soviet Union. It was defended by troops in two major rings of fortifications, which had been constructed around the city, mainly by the women and children of Leningrad. The inner ring focused on Duderhof Hills, the key point in the defensive line.

The first German artillery shells landed in the city on September 4. Two days later, it was subjected to its first bombing attack. With the Germans clearly closing in, Stalin reinforced Leningrad with three

newly formed armies. In the city itself, the Soviets formed 300,000 factory workers into 20 Red militia divisions. The troops was so raw and untrained, however, that they did little to impede the progress of the Germans, and most of them never came home again.

During the first week of September, Field Marshal von Leeb received the loan of General Hoth's 3rd Panzer Group (LVII and XXXIX Panzer Corps) from Army Group Center. He used it to smash the three Soviet armies between Staraya Russa and Kholm. This enabled him to anchor his right flank and bring up the XXVIII Corps and XXXIX Panzer Corps (under Busch), for the decisive attack on the city.

For the final offensive, Reinhardt's XXXXI Panzer Corps (36th Motorized, 1st Panzer, and 6th Panzer Divisions) was chosen to launch the main attack, while, on the extreme eastern flank, Rudolf Schmidt's XXXIX Panzer Corps had the task of capturing Schluesselburg on the southern shore of Lake Ladoga, which would seal off the city from the rest of the Soviet Union, except by water.

On September 8, Leeb began his final assault on the city. Simultaneously, the 1st Air Fleet subjected Leningrad to a massive aerial bombardment, during which it dropped tons of incendiaries. The bombs set fire to the Badayev warehouses, which were wooden buildings, each separated from the next by only a few feet. Inside the warehouses lay Leningrad's entire reserve food supply. This is exactly the wrong way to store such critical provisions. The city's entire food reserve was burned, except for the sugar. It melted, all 2,500 tons of it, and flowed into the cellars, where it solidified into a substance that resembled hard candy. Later it was sold to the population ''as is,'' when almost all the other types of food were gone.

Despite fierce resistance, Reinhardt's troops pushed slowly forward, until, at last, at 11:30 A.M. on September 11, Hill 167—the famous ''General's Hill'' of the Czars—fell to the 6th Panzer Division, and one of the spearhead commanders signaled that he could see St. Petersburg and the sea. In the meantime, the men of the 291st Infantry Division knocked out 150 concrete pillboxes in a single day, while the 58th Infantry Division captured a Leningrad tram car in the suburb of Uritsk, only six miles from the center of the city. Schleusselburg also fell, closing the system of rivers, lakes and canals that linked Leningrad with the White Sea and the Arctic Ocean, and sealing off the city to the east. By now, the forward tanks crews could see the golden spires of the Admiralty building. Leningrad was doomed—or so it seemed. Then on September 12, Adolf Hitler ordered Ritter von Leeb not to take the city. He was to merely blockade it and starve it into submission. Simultaneously, Army Group North was ordered to give up XXXXI Panzer Corps, LVII Panzer Corps, and the VIII Air Corps, as well as Headquarters, 3rd and 4th Panzer Groups—a total of five panzer and two motorized divisions, and

the bulk of its air support. In return, Hitler promised to sent Leeb a German infantry division then in France, as well as the 250th (Spanish) ''Blue'' Infantry Division and two parachute regiments.

Leeb immediately protested this strategically ridiculous order but was overridden by Hitler, who had committed one of the greatest tactical blunders of the war. Thirty Soviet divisions were trapped in the city but not destroyed. As winter descended on northern Russia, the Soviets were able to build a ''Road of Life'' across the ice of Lake Ladoga and even constructed a railroad across it. Although thousands starved to death, just as Hitler had planned, Leningrad was nevertheless able to hold out for 28 months, tying down the desperately needed 18th and 16th Armies in the process. In the end, the Soviets managed to break the siege. Leningrad was never taken.

Meanwhile, far to the north, Colonel General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst's Army of Norway could not capture the Arctic Ocean port of Murmansk. Displeased with Falkenhorst, Hitler created the Army of Lapland under Colonel General Eduard Dietl on November 7. He would also prove unable to capture the port. The Far North front would remain stalemated until September 1944.

THE FINAL DECISION

And what was happening in the critical zone of Army Group Center during the first two weeks of August, while Stalin and Timoshenko were moving heaven and earth to scrape together every available formation for the defense of Moscow?

OKH and Army Group Center were virtually paralyzed with indecision. Bock and his subordinates were still almost unanimously in favor of resuming the offensive toward the Soviet capital, in spite of Hitler's decision; however, no one wanted to confront the wrath of the Fuehrer. Meanwhile, Guderian, once again on the edge of insubordination, was still planning for a drive against Moscow, despite Hitler's orders to the contrary. On August 11, however, Bock notified Guderian that his plan had been rejected by OKH as ''completely unsatisfactory.''[27]

On August 15, the Soviet offensive against Leeb's right flank at Staraya Russa began. As a result, Hoth was ordered to send another panzer corps (Schmidt's XXXIX, with the 12th Panzer and two motorized divisions) to Army Group North, to help rescue Busch's 16th Army. ''We reckoned with 200 Russian divisions'' when Barbarossa began, Halder noted in his diary that evening. ''Now we have already counted 360. Our front on this broad expanse is too thin, it has no depth. In consequence the enemy attacks often meet with success.''[28] Bock's ability to continue the drive on Moscow was severely curtailed by the loss of

the XXXIX Panzer, but still no final plans were made for the resumption of the offensive and vital time was wasted. On August 18, Brauchitsch finally mustered up enough courage to submit a memorandum to Hitler, calling for a drive against Moscow, but Hitler emphatically rejected it. In a handwritten answer, he informed the commander-in-chief of the army that the maximum effort was to be placed on the southern attack; furthermore, he criticized OKH for allowing the panzer units to operate too independently and to push too far ahead of the infantry, which, he said, had allowed too many enemy units to break through the loose encirclements and escape. Thus reprimanded and cowed, Brauchitsch meekly relayed Hitler's orders to Halder and Army Group Center.

The final chapter in the crisis began on August 22, when Guderian was ordered to move his XXIV Panzer Corps to the Klintsy-Pochep area, on the left flank of Weichs's 2nd Army. Once again Guderian protested, stating that the idea of sending his panzer group to the south was ''criminal folly.''[29] The next day, Halder arrived at von Bock's headquarters at Novy Borisov. Here he met with Bock and Guderian, and, on Bock's suggestion, it was decided that the panzer leader should personally appeal to Hitler and talk him out of the drive to the south. Halder and Guderian boarded a Ju-52 and took off for Loetzen that very afternoon.

When they landed at the airfield near Fuehrer Headquarters just before nightfall, they were met by Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, who was in a state of nervous agitation. ''I forbid you to mention the question of Moscow to the Fuehrer,'' he told Guderian. ''The operation to the south has been ordered. The problem now is simply how it is to be carried out. Discussion is pointless.''

Guderian replied that, in that case, he would fly back to his headquarters immediately, since any conversation he had with Hitler would be a waste of time. No, Brauchitsch answered, he must see the Fuehrer and report on the condition of the panzer group, ''but without mentioning Moscow!''[30]

When the meeting took place, Guderian had a large audience, including Keitel, Jodl, and several OKW officers; neither Brauchitsch nor Halder was present. Hitler listened in silence to Guderian's report, and then asked, ''In view of their past performance, do you consider that your troops are capable of making another great effort?''

''If the troops are given a major objective, the importance of which is apparent to every soldier, yes.''

''You mean, of course, Moscow?'' the Fuehrer asked.

''Yes,'' Guderian responded, and then gave him the reasons for his opinions. Hitler listened impassively until Guderian had finished. Then Hitler spoke in great detail about the economic reasons behind his decision, concluding, ''My generals know nothing about the economic aspects of war.''

As the Leader spoke, Guderian noticed the attitude of the OKW officers in attendance. ''I saw here for the first time a spectacle with which I was later to become very familiar: all those present nodded in agreement with every sentence that Hitler uttered, while I was left alone with my point of view.''[31]

Since he saw that the decision to attack into the Ukraine was not going to be reversed, Guderian recalled later, he begged Hitler not to split the panzer group as was intended, but to commit the entire 2nd Panzer to the operation. Hitler agreed to back Guderian on this point, and as a result, Army Group Center was also deprived of XXXXVII Panzer Corps, leaving it with only von Vietinghoff's XXXXVI Panzer (7th Panzer, 11th Panzer, and 14th Motorized Divisions). Had the XXXXVII been allowed to remain with Army Group Center and rebuild its tank strength, instead of being committed to a long and strength-consuming drive to the south, the ensuing drive on Moscow might have been successful. This is doubtful, but, in any case, Halder felt betrayed. Guderian reported that, when he heard the news, the chief of the General Staff ''suffered a complete nervous collapse, which led him to make accusations and imputations which were utterly unjustified.''[32] Unjustified or not, it is obvious that Halder believed that Guderian had allowed Hitler to bribe him. He telephoned Bock and told him that Guderian had let them down, and the relationship between the panzer group commander and the chief of the General Staff was never the same. Halder then urged Brauchitsch to join him in resigning in protest of the decision to forego Moscow. This Brauchitsch would not do, and Halder (who was no Beck) would not resign alone. So Hitler had his way; Army Group Center lost four of its five panzer corps, as well as three infantry corps and most of its air support, and Moscow was saved.

ARMY GROUP SOUTH

On June 22, it will be recalled, Rundstedt's Army Group South consisted of two wings. In the north, between the southern edge of the Pripet Marshes and the foothills of the Carpathians, lay Reichenau's 6th Army, Kleist's 1st Panzer Group, and Stuelpnagel's 17th Army. The other German army (Schobert's 11th) was intermixed the Romanian and Hungarian units and was not scheduled to go over to the offensive until July.

Facing Rundstedt was the bulk of the Red Army. Led initially by Colonel General Kirponos, the commander of the Kiev Military District, the forces defending west of the Ukraine included four armies, with three mechanized corps in close support of the infantry and three others further back. The legions Rundstedt struck on June 22 were thus

much stronger than his own formations, but they were too scattered; nevertheless, Kirponos's divisions gave a much better account of themselves than did the Red units facing either Leeb or Bock.

The day the invasion began, Kirponos ordered up all three of his mechanized corps, with the intention of concentrating them northeast of Rovno (where the 22nd Mechanized Corps was already in position) and launching a massive counterattack from there against 1st Panzer Group's left flank. General von Kleist, however, was too fast for him. He broke through the Soviet frontier defenses and headed directly for Rovno, where he smashed the 22nd Mechanized Corps on the very first day of the invasion. The 15th Mechanized Corps tried to reach Rovno from the south, but was blocked by von Kleist and received a bloody check. A series of uncoordinated counterattacks developed, in which Kleist defeated each Soviet unit piecemeal. The 8th Mechanized Corps (which was equipped with modern T-34 tanks) attacked alone and was severely battered, while the 9th and 19th Mechanized Corps struggled for four days to reach the battlefield, under relentless bombardment from the Luftwaffe. They were already at about half strength when they went into action on June 26 and were promptly swamped by the veterans of the 1st Panzer Group. In all, Kleist's 600 panzers defeated 2,400 Soviet tanks, many of which were technologically superior to his PzKw IIIs and IVs, which were the best tanks the Third Reich had in 1941. Kirponos's counterattacks, however, had at least slowed down the German advance. ''The enemy leadership in front of A. G. South is remarkably energetic,'' Halder recorded in his diary, ''his endless flank and frontal attacks are causing us heavy losses.'' The next day he added, ''One has to admit that the Russian leadership on this front is doing a pretty good job.''[33]

Kirponos's tank losses in the frontier battles were extremely heavy; by June 28 he was in full retreat, covered by the survivors of his mechanized corps. Kleist took Lvov (Lwow) on June 30, reached the old Stalin Line on July 3 and broke through it on July 6, despite several strong Soviet counterattacks. On July 10, Kleist took Zhitomir (about 90 miles west of Kiev) after defeating heavy attacks from three mechanized corps. That same day the Soviet 5th Army, reinforced with the surviving elements of the 9th, 19th, and 22nd Mechanized Corps, emerged from the southern edge of the Pripet Marshes and cut Kleist's main supply line. Field Marshal von Reichenau, following behind with his 6th Army, had to commit much of his infantry to restore contact with von Kleist.

The terrain of Galacia and the western Ukraine was far from ideal for armored operations. It was heavily forested, much of it was swampy, and the roads were predominately made out of sand or dirt. Bypassed Red Army or partisan units operating in the German rear constantly disrupted German supply lines, to the point that, between

June 22 and July 10, 1st Panzer Group could only average an advance of 10 miles a day and even less after that—far from the blitzkrieg that Hitler was hoping for.

Meanwhile, on July 10, Stalin reorganized his forces in the south. The South and Southwest Fronts, under F. V. Tyulenev and Kirponos, respectively, were merged to form the Southwest Theater, under Marshal Semen M. Budenny.

Semen Budenny bore a superficial resemblance to the American General Patton, with his love of horses, the cavalry charge, his mahogany-handled revolvers, his womanizing, and his unorthodox manner. He had none of Patton's ability to lead men in battle, however; Stalin's appreciation of his reliability was the sole reason that he had advanced to this high rank. The dictator ordered Budenny to hold Kiev at all costs and gave the southern sector priority in the allocation of men and equipment. Aided by the rail system of the Ukraine (the most highly deployed in the Soviet Union), Budenny was soon able to assemble formidable forces in two areas (as dictated by the railroads): one in Kiev itself, the second at Uman. By the second week in July, he had about 1.5 million men—roughly half of the strength of the Red Army in the field at that time.

Kleist, meanwhile, concentrated his three panzer corps (III, XIV, and XXXXVIII) at Zhitomir and, on July 12, started an offensive aimed at separating Uman and Kiev. He made rapid progress against Budenny's predominately infantry (''infantry heavy'') forces and, during the night of July 15–16, cut the vital Berdichev-Kazat railroad, effectively splitting the Red forces in two. Meanwhile, Reichenau's 6th Army followed Kleist and applied pressure to the flanks of the Kiev concentration, while Carl-Heinrich von Stueplnagel's 17th Army pinned down the Uman forces from the west and north. At the same time, the infantry of Schobert's 11th Army pushed across the Bug River at Gaivoron, 30 miles south of Uman, and headed toward Novo Ukrainka, deep in the Soviet rear. Marshal Budenny reacted very slowly and did not seem to appreciate the danger his Uman concentration was in. In any event, Wietersheim's XIV Panzer Corps of Kleist's group rapidly turned due south and linked up with Stueplnagel's vanguard at Pervomaysk, forming the first large encirclement on the southern sector of the Eastern Front. By the time the Uman Pocket was cleared by the 11th and 17th Armies on August 8, the Reds had lost 103,000 men captured, including two army commanders, along with 317 tanks and 1,100 guns captured or destroyed.[34] By this time, Kleist's spearheads had advanced as far as Kirovgrad, more than 100 miles southeast of Kiev. By August 17, the III Panzer and XIV Panzer Corps had captured Krivoy Rog (the principle iron-ore center of the Soviet Union) and had pushed into the great bend of the Dnieper. In the meantime, Schobert,

supported by Germany's Hungarian and Romanian allies, was threatening Odessa and was advancing on the Dnieper estuary against light opposition. He crossed the mighty river above Kherson on August 21. General von Mackensen's III Panzer Corps crossed the river above the huge industrial city of Dnepropetrovsk the following day and entered the place on the 25th. Now nothing stood between Kleist's panzers and the occupation of the Donetz Basin (the Ukraine's huge industrial complex) except a few scattered militia units and local defense troops.

In the meantime, as we have seen, Guderian prepared to advance behind Kiev from the north. Elements of Reichenau's hard-marching army had already worked their way behind Kiev and were nearing Cherkassy, while the seven infantry divisions of Stuelpnagel's 17th Army (freed by the fall of Uman) marched 30 to 40 miles a day and seized a bridgehead over the Dnieper at Kremenchug on August 22 and 23. The encirclement of Kiev was already taking shape.

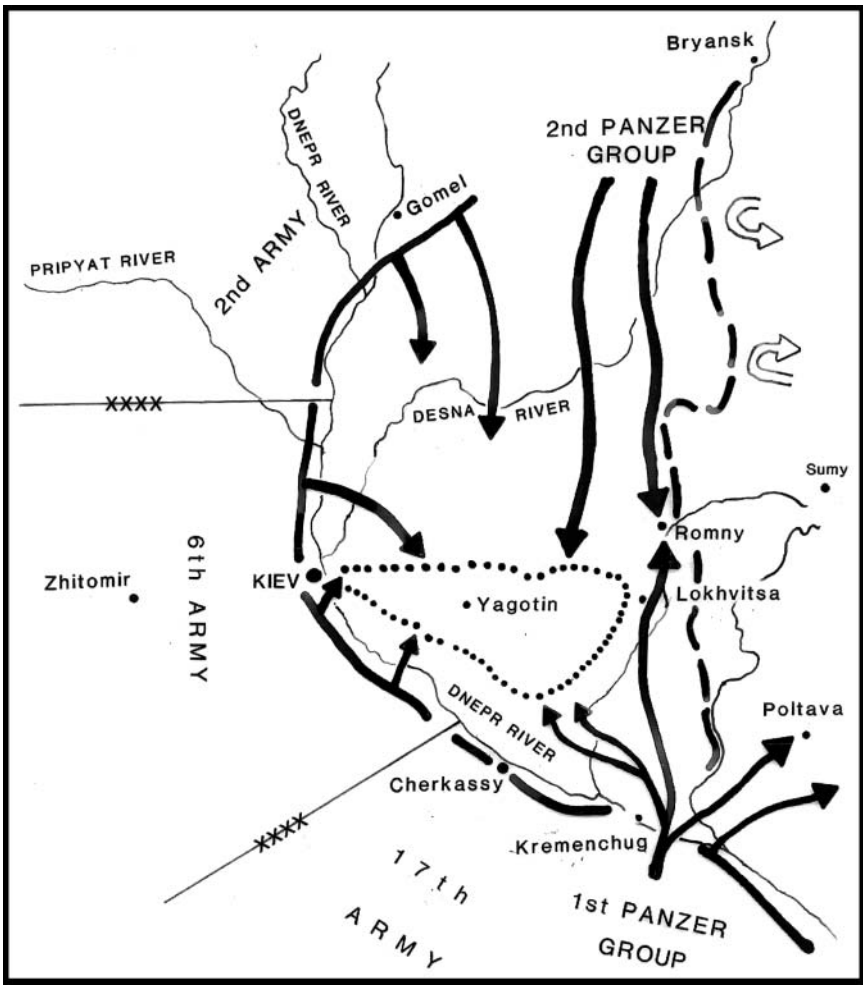
While all of this was going on, Budenny sat in the capital of the Ukraine, doing nothing. His few surviving tanks were largely immobilized by lack of fuel, but, even so, he did very little to prevent the encirclement of Kiev. He assigned the task of defending the north bank of the Dnieper (southeast of Kiev) to the 48th Army, which was much too weak to hold a 120-plus mile frontage against the 17th Army and the 1st Panzer Group. But Stalin had ordered Budenny to hold Kiev at all costs, and that is what he intended to do, oblivious to the encirclement that was developing behind him.

THE BATTLE OF THE KIEV POCKET

General Guderian wheeled south and began his drive behind Kiev on September 9, taking the Russians completely by surprise. The gap between Timoshenko's armies (facing Army Group Center) and Budenny's northern flank was more than 120 miles, defended only by remnants of the Soviet 5th Army, which could do little to even slow the panzertruppen down. The 2nd Panzer Group was delayed as much by the poor roads through the deep forests as by the Soviets.

Guderian's group was divided into two columns (one for each corps), which advanced about 30 miles apart. Geyr's XXIV Panzer Corps was spearheaded by Model's 3rd Panzer Division, while the 17th Panzer Division (under the temporary command of Ritter von Thoma) led the advance of Joachim Lemelsen's XXXXVII Panzer. By the third day of the offensive, Model had already covered 60 miles and captured the bridge over the Desna at Novgorod-Severski, thus overcoming the last natural barrier between the 2nd and 1st Panzer Groups. Kleist, meanwhile, took over the 17th Army's footholds north of the

Figure 31.2
The Battle of Kiev



Dnieper and attacked to the north on September 10. He was held up for two days, but on September 12 broke out from his bridgeheads at Cherkassy and Kremenchug and barreled into the Russian-rear, spearhead by Major General Hans Valentin Hube's 16th Panzer Division. The one-armed Hube advanced with incredible speed, covering 43 miles in the first 12 hours. He made contact with Model near Romny, 130 miles east of Kiev, on September 14, closing the ring on the largest encirclement achieved during World War II (see Figure 31.2).

Inside the pocket, the confusion was total. Stalin relieved Budenny on September 13 and had him flown out of the pocket, to command reserve forces in the interior. With his departure, the last semblance of central command also disappeared. On September 16, Stalin finally authorized the forces in the pocket to withdraw, but the breakouts were made by individual armies and corps, without central direction. As a result, they amounted to little more than human wave attacks. Kiev, the third-largest city in the Soviet Union, fell on September 19, and by September 26, the battle was over. The final bag was 667,000 prisoners, and 3,718 guns and 884 tanks captured or destroyed. Among the dead was Colonel General Kirponos, one of Russia's most capable generals, who was killed by a German shell, presumably while trying to find an escape route out of the pocket. Four Soviet armies were destroyed, along with part of two others, and the Ukraine—the breadbasket of the Soviet Union—was now lost to Stalin, as was the critical Donetz industrial region, including Kharkov, the fourth-largest city in the Soviet Union. As a reward for their part in this victory, the 1st and 2nd Panzer Groups were upgraded to panzer armies on October 6.

To date, since the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, the Soviets had lost 2.5 million men, 22,000 guns, 18,000 tanks, and 14,000 airplanes. Hitler's strategic objectives had been largely achieved and OKH was already discussing plans to withdraw and demobilize about 80 divisions from the Soviet Union after it surrendered. A wave of optimism swept through the General Staff at Zossen, where the general feeling was that one more major victory would finish off the Soviets. At the front, however, the feelings of the troops were not nearly so optimistic. One German soldier wrote—

> The billet is full of lice.... Socks which we put there to dry were white with lice eggs. We've caught fleas—absolute prize specimens.... What a country, what a war, where there's no pleasure in success, no pride, no satisfaction; only a feeling of suppressed fury now and then.[35]

The soldiers felt a deep sense of foreboding, as if they were advancing deeper into another world, a strange and dangerous world, from which many of them would not return.

They were right.

THE DOUBLE BATTLE OF VYAZMA-BRYANSK

When Hitler deprived Bock of 80 percent of his tank units in the second half of August, the road to Moscow was clear. By the end of the month, Stalin had rushed several new armies to the threatened sector, and Bock had no choice but to go over to the defensive with the 9th

and 4th Armies. By the end of September, Stalin had concentrated 15 armies (1.5 million to 2 million men) against Army Group Center. These were, however, the weakest armies Moscow would ever put in the field. They were made up almost entirely of reservists, who had little or no basic training. They also had few tanks or trucks, and even horses were in short supply. Their sole mission was to buy time, until ''General Winter'' could arrive and save the Soviet Union.

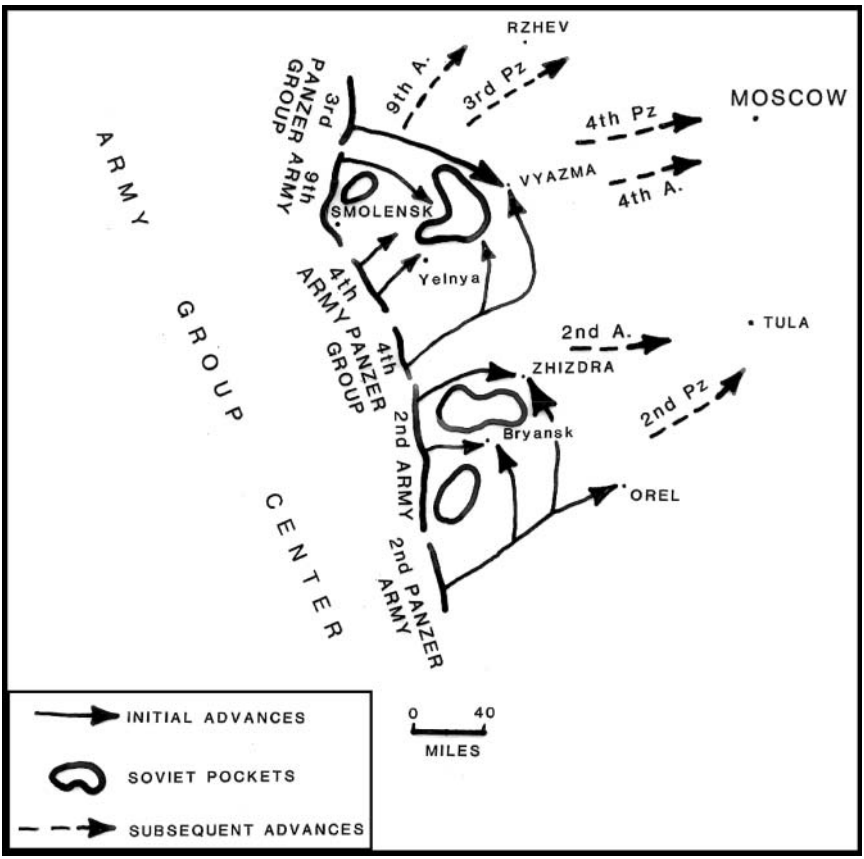
After the fall of Kiev, OKH thinned out Army Groups North and South and reinforced Army Group Center to a strength of 70 divisions, including 14 panzer and eight motorized infantry divisions. In addition, it was supported by Kesselring's 2nd Air Fleet, which now controlled about 1,000 of the 2,400 aircraft operating on the Eastern Front. Field Marshal von Brauchitsch met with Bock and his principle subordinates on September 15, to discuss the next phase of operations: the destruction of Timoshenko's forces and the final drive to Moscow. Now that Soviet resistance in the Ukraine had been broken, Hitler no longer objected to seizing Stalin's capital before the onset of winter. Only Gerd von Rundstedt spoke emphatically against this course of action. He wanted to go into winter quarters at once, arguing that the Red Army could not be defeated before winter arrived, but his ideas were firmly opposed by Brauchitsch, Halder, Bock, Kluge, Hoth, Guderian, Kesselring, and others.

Specifically, Brauchitsch planned to commit three of Germany's five panzer groups/armies to the attack. Due to the lateness of the season and the poor mechanical condition of the tanks, OKH decided not to return the 2nd Panzer, 3rd Panzer, or 2nd Army to Smolensk; they would attack from where they were. This gave Army Group Center a total frontage of about 400 miles.

From north to south, as shown in Figure 31.3, Bock deployed the 3rd Panzer Group (Hoth); the 9th Army (Strauss); the 4th Army (Kluge); the 4th Panzer Group (Hoepner); the 2nd Army (Weichs); and the 2nd Panzer Army (Guderian). His plan was for Hoepner to break through the Soviet center and split the Red Army into two parts, which would then be destroyed in separate battles of encirclement. After he achieved his breakthrough, Hoepner was to wheel north and link up with Hoth (advancing to the south), to form a huge pocket around Vyazma. Meanwhile, Strauss and Kluge were to attack the Soviets frontally, to pin them down north of the Smolensk-Yelnya line, while Hoth and Hoepner cut them off. Simultaneously, to the south, Weichs and Guderian were to converge on Bryansk and Zhizdra, in a separate envelopment.

Bock began his offensive on the morning of September 30. Hans-Karl Schmidt (writing under the pseudonym of Paul Carell) later called the double battle of Vyazma-Bryansk ''the most perfect battle of

Figure 31.3
The Vyazma-Bryansk Encirclement



encirclement in military history.''[36] To everyone's surprise, Guderian easily broke through the Soviet 13th Army, and his spearheads covered 80 miles on the first day of the battle. On October 6, 17th Panzer Division took Bryansk in a surprise coup, and later that day Guderian linked up with Weichs's 2nd Army, encircling 26 divisions (three Soviet armies). The next day, 10th Panzer Division of Hoepner's 4th Panzer Group took Vyazma and linked up with 3rd Panzer Group's vanguards, encircling six more Soviet armies and sealing the fate of 55 enemy divisions. The fighting continued until October 17, and several Russian units did succeed in breaking out to the east, but the Battle of Vyazma-Bryansk cost Stalin another 663,000 men, 1,242 tanks, and 5,412 guns.[37]

The Vyazma encirclement was an auspicious beginning for the 3rd Panzer Group's new commander, Georg-Hans Reinhardt. Brauchitsch had fallen out with Carl-Heinrich von Stuelpnagel, the commander of the 17th Army (who had proven to be an unsatisfactory field commander) and relieved him of his post on October 5. Hoth was chosen to replace him, and Reinhardt succeeded Hoth. (At OKH, this was looked upon as a promotion for Hoth.) Walter Model took Reinhardt's place as commander of XXXXI Panzer Corps.

THE BATTLE OF MOSCOW

Long before the Vyazma-Bryansk Pockets were cleared by the infantry, von Bock's panzer spearheads turned toward Moscow, the ''grand prize'' of Operation Barbarossa. The going by now was difficult, even though resistance was light, due to the fact that the Red Army had been crushed. The first snow fell on October 7. It melted quickly, but it began to rain incessantly on October 9, turning the Russian roads into rivers of mud. It was virtually impossible to bring up fuel, ammunition, food, replacements, or winter clothing to the front. There was very little winter clothing available in any case, because OKH had accepted Hitler's conclusion that there would be no winter campaign and had only ordered enough for about one-third of its divisions. There were also no replacements. When the campaign began, General Fromm, the commander-in-chief of the Home Army and an opponent of Operation Barbarossa, had warned that he could only furnish about 430,000 replacements in 1941, and these had been used up by September. In spite of their successes, German casualties had not been light. As of the beginning of September, 14 divisions reported personnel deficiencies of greater than 4,000 men; 40 divisions were short between 3,000 and 4,000 men, while 30 divisions were 2,000 to 3,000 men below their authorized strength levels.[38] Naturally, most of the shortages were found in the combat units, especially the infantry. By September 26, the German Army had suffered 534,000 casualties on the Eastern Front—15 percent of its total establishment in the East.[39] Bock nevertheless continued his offensive with a tenacity that bordered on stubbornness. On October 14, Reinhardt's panzers, followed closely by the infantry of the 9th Army, took Kalinin, the northern hinge of Moscow's defenses, and rolled down the Volga as far as the Moscow Canal, only 70 miles north of the Kremlin. For the next three days, there was panic in the capital of the Soviet Union, heightened by the news that the government offices were being evacuated to Kuybyshev in the Ural Mountains. There was widespread looting, the food distribution system broke down, and Communist Party members were assaulted on the

streets. No one knew where Stalin was, and all sorts of rumors proliferated. Order was not restored until the 19th, when the city was declared under a state of siege and special units of NKVD security troops took charge of the capital.

Since October 9, all of the forces defending Moscow had been under the command of Marshal Zhukov, whose primary objectives were to hold the city and keep his command ''in being'' until the winter arrived in earnest. The harsh and often brutal Zhukov organized ''workers' battalions'' from the Moscow factories and hurled them into battle with little or no training and often armed only with Molotov cocktails. Meanwhile, more than 500,000 of the city's other inhabitants (mostly women) were drafted into construction battalions and spent day and night digging anti-tank ditches and trenches, and building bunkers.

Due to the broken, forested nature of the terrain north of the Soviet capital, Reinhardt never had the best chance of capturing Moscow. The real danger was to the south, where Heinz Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group had debouched in reasonably good tank country and was driving on Tula, a major industrial city south of Moscow. Consequently, Zhukov committed the bulk of his best forces here. Meanwhile, Stalin brought up his last strategic reserves: the Siberian divisions of General Iosif Apanasenko's Far Eastern Front. These were some of the best-trained and well-equipped units in the entire Red Army. The Soviet dictator could afford to take this step, because he knew that the Japanese were not going to attack in the East. He had learned this from Richard Sorge, his master spy in Tokyo.

Another valuable source of information was ''Lucy,'' the code name for Rudolf Roessler, a German writer living in Switzerland. A severely wounded World War I veteran, he hated Nazism with a passion and, prior to the outbreak of the war, set up a spy ring within the Wehrmacht. His agents included eight officers in OKW and two in OKL. They worked in the army's operations, logistical, transportation, military economics, and communications offices, and five of them were generals. They apparently included Hans Oster, the deputy chief of the Abwehr; Major General Fritz Thiele, the deputy of General Fellgiebel, the chief signals officer of the High Command of the Armed Forces; Abwehr agent Hans Bernard Gisevius; and Carl Goerdeler, the former Lord Mayor of Leipzig and the civilian leader of the German resistance.[40]

Lucy's information was extremely accurate and included day-to-day changes in the German order of battle. His intelligence dispatches to Moscow eventually totaled 12,000 closely typed pages: the equivalent of about 40 average length books. By 1942, scarcely 10 hours elapsed between the making of a decision at OKW and Lucy's learning about it.[41] ''[I]n the end,'' one Soviet intelligence expert said later, ''Moscow

very largely fought the war on Lucy's messages.''[42] This state of affairs continued until November 1943, when Walter Schellenberg (the chief of the SS intelligence branch) almost tracked Roessler down and forced the Swiss (who pretended they knew nothing about it) to shut down the spy ring. In any case, Stalin knew that he could safely move his Siberian divisions to the Moscow sector in November 1941.

By this point, the forward German units were in particularly bad shape. The infantry had received no new boots, socks, or shirts for weeks, and their footwear was literally falling apart. The supply difficulties were simply insurmountable. The German Army was now at the end of a 1,000-mile-long supply line, and the snow and the primitive road system severely limited the amount of food, fuel, and ammunition that the forward units could receive. The 3rd Panzer, 9th, and 4th Armies, for example, all used just two roads: the same number two divisions would have used in France. Hoepner's 4th Panzer Group had to share the only hard-surfaced road in his zone of operations with Weichs's 2nd Army, and Guderian had no hard-surfaced roads at all. Due to the cold, it was necessary to run the engines of the trucks and tanks every four hours, which further exacerbated the fuel crisis. In addition, the railroads were virtually useless. Most of the Soviet rolling stock had been evacuated or destroyed as the Red Army retreated (only 500 Soviet locomotives and 21,000 cars had been captured—about 10 percent of what was needed), and German trains were built for standard-gauge rails, not for the wide gauge of the Soviet Union. The process of converting the broad-gauge Russian rail system to standard European gauge had just begun.

Getting spare parts to the motor pools was also a major problem. At the end of October, for example, Walter Nehring's 18th Panzer Division had lost 59 tanks due to accidents and enemy action, but 103 tanks were inoperative due to a lack of spare parts.[43] The story was the same in every panzer division, which were down to the strength of reinforced regiments as the Battle of Moscow began.

Off of the roads, progress was virtually impossible, except on foot. The mud was so bad that the 292nd Infantry Division reported that a team of 16 horses was not able to move a single howitzer of the 292nd Artillery Regiment. Motorized supply columns were averaging less than five miles a day, and more than 2,000 vehicles were stuck on the Moscow Highway alone.[44] ''[T]he internal combustion engine is a dead loss in winter warfare,'' one German soldier wrote. ''Everything has to go by sledge. Where all the sledges come from is a mystery. But how all the horses survive is a greater one still.... The native ponies live by water and straw and beating.''[45] The Luftwaffe was grounded, but not the Red Air Force, which was operating on paved airfields in the Moscow area.

Due to all of these difficulties, von Bock halted his offensive on October 30 to await freezing weather. Then the ground would again be hard enough to bring up food and ammunition, and resume the advance. Meanwhile, most the infantry remained rationless and, after they consumed their Iron Rations (a concoction of chocolate laced with caffeine, to be eaten only in emergencies), they subsisted mainly on tea and potatoes they looted from local farms. Some units lived on almost nothing but horsemeat for up to six weeks at a time. Soon sickness, the cold, dysentery, and malnutrition were causing more casualties than the enemy bullets.

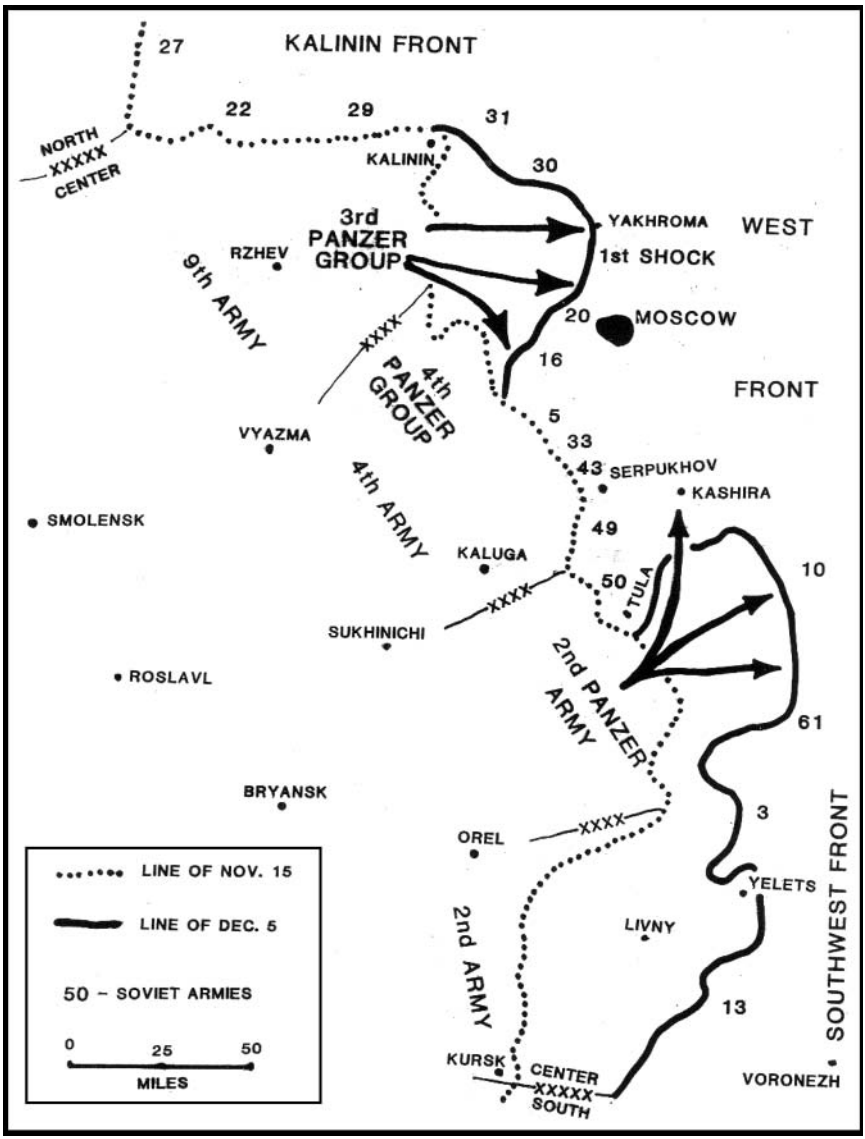
The final effort to take Stalin's capital began on November 15. North to south, Bock attacked with the 9th Army, the 3rd Panzer Group, the 4th Panzer Group, 4th Army, and the 2nd Panzer Army. Weichs's 2nd Army, while still part of Army Group Center, had to be moved far to the south, to try to maintain contact with Army Group South, and played no further role in the Battle of Moscow. Figure 31.4 shows Bock's dispositions and his final thrusts toward the Soviet capital.

During the first two weeks of November alone, Stalin had brought up 100,000 men, 2,000 guns, and 300 tanks from the Far East. By mid-November, Zhukov was able to deploy three fronts: West Front (six armies); Kalinin Front (three armies); and South-West Front (two armies). In all, he had 60 rifle divisions, 17 tank brigades, and 14 cavalry divisions—a total of 91 major combat formations. Stalin, however, was not through bringing up units from the East. By the end of the winter of 1941–42, he brought up 15 rifle divisions, three cavalry divisions, and eight tank brigades (1,700 tanks), as well as 1,500 airplanes, in addition to the units already at the front.[46] Bock, on the other hand, had only 38 infantry, 13 panzer, and seven motorized divisions—a total of 58 major formations.[47] Needless to say, many of the Soviet formations and all of the German units were well below their authorized strength.

By now, large sections of the German Army were virtually immobilized. On November 19, Halder informed Hitler that 30 percent of the half a million trucks that entered Russia had been destroyed or damaged beyond repair. Another 40 percent were nonoperational and awaiting overhaul or major repairs. Only 30 percent were still on the roads.[48] Most the army was now being supplied by two-wheeled *panje* (peasant) wagons, pulled by local Russian ponies, which lived where the heavier European horses died—even though they usually had nothing to eat except straw from the local thatched roofs.

Bock's progress toward Moscow was slow. Hoth's 3rd Panzer Group captured Klin on November 23, and Baron von Funck's 7th Panzer Division reached the Moscow-Volga Canal on November 28. A battle group under the command of Colonel Baron Hasso von Manteuffel crossed the canal but was soon under attack by the Siberians and could

Figure 31.4
Army Group Center, November 15 to December 5, 1941



advance no further. Lieutenant General Rudolf Veiel's 2nd Panzer Division, however, made a superhuman effort and pushed into the outskirts of Moscow, and its reconnaissance battalion even managed to get Nazi Germany's only glimpse of the Kremlin, less than 15 miles away.

It was the high water mark of the Third Reich.

To the south, Guderian forced his way up toward Oka, but was unable to take Tula, which was defended by the entire Soviet 50th Army, reinforced by several workers' battalions. Guderian then bypassed it to the east and continued his advance to the north, screening his long flanks with infantry formations. One of these was Lieutenant General Friedrich Mieth's 112th Infantry Division, which was posted on Guderian's right (eastern) flank. All three of its infantry regiments had suffered more than 50 percent casualties due to frostbite, its machine guns were so badly frozen that they could only fire single shots, and the packing grease on its anti-tank ammunition had frozen so solid that it had to be scraped with a knife before it would fit into the breech of the AT guns. On November 18, the 112th was attacked by a fresh Siberian infantry division, outfitted in white quilted uniforms and armed with tommy guns, and supported by an entire brigade of T-34 tanks. It was too much for the weary, lice-infested survivors of the 112th, who broke and ran away. This was the first time such an incident had occurred on the Russian Front.

Zhukov wanted to hold his Siberians in reserve until the Germans had exhausted themselves, then commit them all in one devastating offensive. Guderian's advance, however, forced him to throw three Siberian divisions and two tank brigades into counterattacks against the 2nd Panzer Army. These attacks halted the German advance and convinced Guderian that it would be impossible to take Moscow. On November 24, he turned up at Bock's headquarters and convinced the field marshal (who was ill and in bed) to telephone OKH and ask permission to call off the offensive. Brauchitsch, however, replied that he was not allowed to make such a far-reaching decision. He ordered Guderian to continue to try to reach the Zaraisk-Mikhailov line and to cut the Ryazan railroad.

Meanwhile, Veiel's drive and Manteuffel's advance across the Moscow-Volga Canal had brought the wrath of the Siberian divisions down on Reinhardt, whose 3rd Panzer Group was brought under heavy counterattack for five days. While this was going on, Guenther von Kluge was conserving his strength (that is, doing nothing), so Hitler personally commanded that his 4th Army resume the offensive on December 2. The next day, Kluge broke the line of the 33rd Soviet Army north of Naro Fominsk and forced Zhukov to commit the reserves of his 33rd and 43rd Armies near the railroad town of Golizno. Kluge suffered heavy losses during this operation and, on his own responsibility, withdrew the 258th Infantry Division from the front, on the grounds that it was no longer battleworthy. The next day the temperature dropped to −4° Fahrenheit (F). and 4th Army was forced back in a heavy snowstorm. The following day, December 5, Field Marshal von Bock called off the offensive, with the acquiescence of OKH. The

nighttime temperatures by now had dropped to −25° F, and quite a few men had frozen to death. Dozens of tanks would not start because the oil in their engines had frozen, and artillery and machine guns would not fire because their lubricants had frozen. Hitler would not accept Bock's decision until December 8, but by then the Battle of Moscow was clearly over. The Soviet winter offensive had already been in progress in the central sector for two days, and Army Group Center was fighting for its very survival.

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CHAPTER XXXII

STALIN'S WINTER OFFENSIVE, 1941–42

THE ZONE OF ARMY GROUP CENTER

With the falling temperatures, Marshal Zhukov launched his counteroffensive at dawn on December 6. The temperature was −38° F. Fortunately for the Germans, the Russian attacks were poorly coordinated and slow in forming in many sectors. The only significant progress the attackers made took place in the zone of the 30th Army, which broke through the 3rd Panzer Army's flank northeast of Klin and penetrated eight miles. By the next day, the Soviet attack had spread north, to the zone of the 9th Army, and 3rd Panzer had begun to pull back from the Moscow-Volga Canal, abandoning 15 tanks and dozens of trucks and other vehicles because they would not start, along with nine guns and assorted other equipment. In all, due to the cold, the panzer army had to leave behind more equipment in one day than they would ordinarily lose in a week of heavy fighting. And the retreat was just beginning.

Meanwhile, back in Berlin, Field Marshal von Brauchitsch worked up the courage to submit his resignation on December 6. He had been contending with Hitler's ruthlessness and deliberate rudeness for four years and had lived on a steady diet of anger, humiliation, frustration, and fear. On November 10, he had suffered his first heart attack. In the hospital, he was told that he had a malignant cardiac disease that was probably incurable.[1] He had nevertheless returned to duty within a few days, determined to take Moscow before he retired. When this proved to be impossible, he resigned. Hitler paced up and down the room for 10 minutes before telling Brauchitsch that he could not allow a change of command at that moment. The marshal got up and walked out without a word.[2]

On December 8, Guderian began to evacuate the salient east of Tula. Here, one corps alone had more than 1,500 frostbite cases that day, and

350 of them required at least one amputation. South of Guderian, Rudolf Schmidt's 2nd Army was in an even more difficult position. (Schmidt had temporarily replaced Baron von Weichs, who was ill.) It held a front 180 miles long with only seven divisions, an average of more than 25 miles per division, or two miles per understrength company. Behind it lay Kursk, its only railhead and major supply depot, and Orel, the railhead and major supply depot for the 2nd Army. That same day, Soviet tanks tore a hole between the 45th and 95th Infantry Divisions and the Red generals pushed a cavalry division through the gap. The next day, they sent two more cavalry divisions and a rifle division into the breakthrough area and expanded the gap to 16 miles. By the end of the day, the Soviet spearheads were 50 miles in the German rear, the 95th Infantry had lost half of its strength, and the 45th had lost more than that. The Luftwaffe promised to help, but was grounded by snow and freezing rain, and Schmidt had no reserves. He signaled Bock that 2nd Army was about to be cut in two; he made contingency plans to fall back on Orel and Kursk, leaving a 85-mile gap in between.

Bock had no reserves either. On the morning of December 9, he telephoned Halder and told him that Army Group Center had to have reinforcements because it could not repulse a major attack anywhere on its front. All of his specialists except tank drivers had already been pressed into the infantry. Halder speculated that the Soviets had committed untrained troops and cadres, which meant, he said, that the situation could be quieter by the end of the month. ''By then the army group will be *kaputt*,'' the field marshal told him.[3] After this conversation, it was clear to Bock that Halder did not appreciate the gravity of the situation. He instructed his subordinate commands to prepare to retreat 60 to 90 miles, to the Rzhev-Gzhatsk-Orel-Kursk line, even though he did not believe he could hold even this.

Zhukov's relentless attacks continued on December 10. The Soviets cut the road west of Klin, 3rd Panzer Army's only route to the west. Reinhardt signaled Army Group Center:

> [D]iscipline is breaking down. More and more soldiers are heading west on foot without weapons, leading a calf on a rope or pulling a sled loaded with potatoes.... All the hangers-on (corps troops, Luftwaffe, supply trains) are pouring to the rear in full flight. Without rations, freezing, irrationally.[4]

Bock's problems continued to multiply, as ice and snow tore down telephone lines and he had difficulty communicating with his subordinate units. Traffic jams in the rear were horrendous, especially on bridges, and, had it not been for the panje wagons, ammunition and rations would not have reached the frontline troops at all. By

December 15, 9th Army was evacuating Kalinin, and 3rd and 4th Panzer Armies were retreating, either on the roads or cross country. Hoepner's army had already lost most of its artillery. ''The roadside scenes were shocking,'' Lieutenant Gerhardt Linke of the 185th Infantry Regiment wrote in his diary. ''I thought such things were possible only on the retreat of the French.... Everywhere smashed up vehicles were lying upside down, the goods they were carrying scattered all over the place.''[5]

''Discipline began to crack,'' General of Panzer Troops Ferdinand Schaal, the commander of the LVI Panzer Corps, recalled ''the entire [corps] supply train—except where units were firmly led—was streaming back in wild flight. Supply units were in the grip of psychosis, almost of panic.... Without food, shivering with cold, in utter confusion, the men moved west.[6]

The case of the LVI Panzer Corps was not unique: it was typical of the entire army group. No doubt about it—the German Army was on the verge of disintegration. Meanwhile, as if the soldiers of the Wehrmacht did not have enough problems, Hitler brought another enemy into the war against them.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Navy launched a surprise attack against the major U.S. Pacific Ocean base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Since Japan was clearly the aggressor, there was nothing in the Tripartite Pact that required Germany to declare war on the United States. Nevertheless, on the afternoon of December 11, amid the cheers of his puppets in the Reichstag, Adolf Hitler hurled insults at Roosevelt and the New Deal and concluded his address by declaring war on the United States.

He had made a fatal blunder.

''NOT ONE STEP BACK''

In the meantime, the situation on the Russian Front continued to deteriorate. On December 11, Guderian withdrew from the Tula salient and fell back in the direction of the upper Don, closely pursued by the Soviets. All of the German spearheads aimed at Moscow were thrown back. Stalin's forces pushed the German northern flank back 30 miles and gained up to 50 against the 2nd Panzer Army, smashing three German infantry divisions. The commander of the 134th Infantry, Lieutenant General Conrad Cochenhausen, committed suicide on the 13th. By the end of the day, half of the 9th Army—100,000 men—were in danger of being cut off. Its only remaining escape route was the road from Kalinin to Staritsa, and it was threatened by four Siberian divisions. General Strauss had only one battalion left—the Bavarians of the III/18th Infantry Regiment of the 6th Infantry Division. It was hastily committed to the battle, with orders to keep the Kalinin road open.

The men of the III Battalion knew that they had been given a suicide mission, but they held their thin line on December 14, despite repeated Soviet attacks. By the end of the day, they were near exhaustion and had lost 182 of their 800 men. They had suffered more casualties in one day than they had suffered in the entire campaign up to that point, but the battle was still not over.

That night, a 15-man Russian patrol captured a four man observation post. They killed three, took the fourth prisoner, and gouged out his eyes with a knife. ''There,'' one of them said in broken German. ''Go straight forward, to your brothers, the other German dogs, and tell them we'll destroy them all. We'll cut out their eyes and send what's left to Siberia—that will be Stalin's revenge. Now get going.'' Like Hitler, the Red Army never learned that such barbaric tactics are usually counterproductive. The soldier, blind and sobbing, reached German lines, and his story threw the III Battalion into a white fury. Sergeant Schnittger, a veteran of considerable bravery, grabbed his machine gun and, followed by nine men, set out after the Soviet patrol. They ambushed the Siberians and riddled them with bullets. Not one escaped, and they took no prisoners.

The next day, the close-quarter fighting was extremely bitter. A pile of Russian corpses stacked up in front of the III Battalion, but it held its positions, in spite of the efforts of four Siberian divisions. Meanwhile, the trapped divisions of the 9th Army made good their escape. When the Bavarians finally retreated, they carried another 150 wounded and frostbitten men with them and left another 120 dead on the battlefield. But their heroic stand saved half of the 9th Army. They were awarded 64 Iron Crosses (an incredible number for a single battalion in a single action) and the German radio dedicated a special program ''to the little battalion that had withstood the onslaught of four Siberian divisions so that half an army could escape.''

''We did not hear the broadcast,'' one of the survivors wrote later. ''Retreating armies jettison their radio sets.''[7]

Meanwhile, the Soviets captured Klin on December 15, and reoccupied Kalinin the next day. Dozens of stuck or disabled German vehicles and guns were captured. As usual on the Eastern Front, the Germans had no reserves, other than four security divisions, which had only two infantry regiments each and little or no artillery. On December 16, von Bock (who was reluctant to talk to Hitler personally) spoke to General Schmundt and asked him to relay his concerns to the Fuehrer. He then poured his heart out. He said that he his ulcers were acting up again, he had the ''Russian disease'' (diarrhea), that his health was shaky at best, and that the Fuehrer might need someone in better physical condition to command the army group. Militarily, he said, it was difficult to tell whether the army group should stay put or

retreat; either way it was likely to be destroyed. At midnight that night, Hitler telephoned Bock and told him that there was only one correct decision: not to go a step back, to close the gaps and hold.[8] By this one command, Hitler took all the initiative out of the hands of his generals and concentrated all of the decision-making power into his own.

Reaction to this order at the higher levels of the German Army varied from resigned acceptance to near rebellion. Bock accepted without protest, but Guderian refused to obey. Brauchitsch, who was now sick in body and spirit, began secretly discussing limited withdrawals to a winter line with Bock, Kluge, and Guderian. Colonel Schmundt, however, got word of these discussions and informed Hitler, who immediately cancelled the plans for a winter line and demanded that the troops hold where they were, regardless of the situation on their flanks or rear. He called in Brauchitsch on December 19 and dismissed him. Their final meeting was acrimonious and ended with Hitler shouting that he was assuming command of the army himself, because he knew of no general who was capable of instilling the spirit of National Socialism into it. But, he added softly, ''We will remain friends.''[9]

News of Brauchitsch's retirement was announced to the world without preface that same day. Hitler named himself commander-in-chief of the Army, and the disgraced field marshal—the scapegoat of the Russian campaign—left Zossen the following day. He never saw Hitler again and died, a broken man, in American captivity in 1947. Privately, Hitler called Brauchitsch ''a vain, cowardly wretch.''[10]

Hitler's assumption of direct command of the army effectively left the army with no commander-in-chief and removed the last vestiges of opposition to Hitler's directives at Fuehrer Headquarters. On December 20, he called Halder in and told him how he wanted the war in the East conducted. ''Fuehrer holds forth at great length on need of holding the line. Every man must fight back where he stands. No falling back when there are no prepared positions in rear,'' Halder noted in his diary.[11]

Meanwhile, on December 18, Field Marshal Keitel telephoned Fedor von Bock and told him that the Fuehrer suggested that he (Bock) apply for an extended leave to restore his health. Bock promptly did so. The following day, he was replaced by von Kluge. Hitler sent Bock word that he did not hold him responsible for the failure to take Moscow.

In the ranks, Hitler's assumption of command of the army led to a collective sigh of relief. The morale of the average German soldier was boosted, because most of the troops still had unbounded faith in the Fuehrer and were ignorant of his true personality. The changes, however, did nothing to improve the deteriorating situation at the front. On December 20, General of Infantry Richard Ruoff (the commander of

the V Corps) and General of Panzer Troops Heinrich von Vietinghoff, the commander of the XXXXVI Panzer Corps, reported to General Hoepner that they could no longer hold their positions. They had had to destroy most of their vehicles due to lack of fuel, and they had lost more than half of their weapons. Hoepner relayed these reports to Kluge. Strauss also reported that his 9th Army was in danger of being crushed.

Kluge obeyed Hitler's orders blindly, because he was a man who placed his own career above all other considerations. If scapegoats were needed, Colonel Seaton wrote, ''von Kluge could find them; if heads must fall, von Kluge took good care to see that his would not be among them.'' He later recorded that ''Kluge had in fact replaced von Brauchitsch as the Fuehrer's postman.''[12] In justice to Kluge, however, it must be noted that he did propose several retreats to Hitler and even succeeded in obtaining the Fuehrer's permission to conduct some of them.

Meanwhile, Stalin became overly ambitious and aimed at nothing less than the total destruction of the entire German Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front. Kluge's armies would be destroyed, Stalin ordered, by a double envelopment; the two pinchers were to join hands at Smolensk. To accomplish this task, Stalin employed 16 armies, including 78 rifle, 22 cavalry, and three tank divisions, and 19 independent rifle and 17 tank brigades.[13] Kluge had a total of 67 divisions (including 2nd Army, which was too far to the south to be of any help).

Much has been made of Hitler's fanatical, stand-fast order, and how it saved the German Army. No doubt it did improve the morale of many soldiers and helped speed the rally that was already taking place. However, it must be pointed out that Army Group Center did not stand fast; it was gradually pushed back 100 to 200 miles and a good case can be made for a rapid strategic withdrawal to a shorter defensive line, in the vicinity of Vyazma or Smolensk, which would have enabled Army Group Center to create a reserve, without suffering the excessive casualties it sustained in the winter of 1941–42. The supply situation would then have been reversed: Kluge would have then been near his supply depots, and Stalin's divisions would have had to contend with long and uncertain supply lines. It must be recalled that the Red Army had lost thousands of trucks and motorized vehicles during the summer and fall, and it had yet to obtain the tens of thousands of trucks it would eventually receive from the United States. It is highly doubtful that it would have been able to defeat the Germans in a major defensive battle if a proper and militarily sound retreat had been conducted. Of course, some might question whether or not the main body of Army Group Center could have broken contact with the Soviets to a sufficient degree to allow them to successfully execute such

a far-ranging retreat, but the evidence (although inconclusive) seems to suggest that they could have. After the fall of Klin, 3rd and 4th Panzer Groups broke contact with the Soviets and, during the week of December 15, dug in unmolested behind the Lama and Ruza Rivers, turned the nearby villages into strongpoints, and even had time for several hot meals and to get up to two full nights of sleep, before the Russians caught up with them and resumed the battle.

Whether or not Hitler's ''stand-fast'' and ''hold-at-all-costs'' ideas were correct, the propaganda ministry made sure that the soldiers of the Wehrmacht and the civilian population heard only that Hitler was right. ''[T]he German Army and public firmly believed that the Fuehrer was the savior of the German Army,'' Colonel Seaton wrote.

> This in itself did great and permanent damage to the German war direction. Hitler was even more convinced of his own military genius and became certain that any crisis could be weathered by will-power and rigidity; he was throughout the course of the war to quote what he believed to be his success before Moscow as a justification for his obdurate and often senseless attitude towards German withdrawals.[14]

Hitler had, in reality, gone a long way toward eliminating Auftragstaktik and replacing it with an order-oriented command system. He defined the essence of defense as holding the main line of resistance at all costs. In the fall of 1942, he restricted the independence and operational control of the field general even further by ordering, ''No army group commander, let alone army commander, is entitled to order a so-called tactical withdrawal without my explicit approval.''[15] He thus formally institutionalized the command system that he had already introduced in December 1941 and largely eliminated one of Germany's most potent military weapons: the tactical initiative of the average German commander.

As the campaign evolved, the German Army suffered an average of 2,800 to 3,500 casualties a day from November 30, 1941, to April 1, 1942. Soviet losses were also high, but German equipment losses were extremely serious. By December 19, 2nd Panzer Army had only 70 operational tanks left and another 168 in repair, out of the 970 it had had when the campaign began or had received since June. As it retreated during the first two weeks in December, 3rd Panzer Group had to abandon or destroy 289 tanks. The 35th Infantry Division lost all but two anti-tank guns and six howitzers. The elite 23rd Infantry Division from Potsdam lost all but about 1,000 of its infantry, and its commander, Lieutenant General Heinz Hellmich, collapsed under the strain, like a great many other commanders. Casualties among officers and senior NCOs were very heavy in the winter battles of 1941–42,

because they went to the forefront of the battle every day to rally their men and—although generally successful—they paid a high price for their success. A partial list of the senior casualties includes:

- General of Infantry Kurt von Briesen, the one-armed hero of the Polish campaign and commander of the LII Corps, killed in action on November 20, 1941
- Colonel Otto von Kries, chief of staff of the I Corps, killed on November 26
- Lieutenant General Herbert Geitner, commander of the 295th Infantry Division, mortally wounded on December 8 and died on January 22, 1942[16]
- Major General Hugo Ribstein, commander of the 81st Infantry Division, mortally wounded on December 8 and died on December 26
- Lieutenant General Friedrich Bergmann, commander of the 137th Infantry Division, killed on December 21
- General of Infantry Hermann Metz, commander of the XXXXIV Corps, severely disabled on December 23 and forced to retire
- Colonel Max-Hermann von Loefen, commander of the 190th Infantry Regiment, killed on January 4, 1942
- Major General Gerhard Berthold, acting commander of the XXXXIII Corps, killed in action on January 24
- Lieutenant General Georg Hewelke, commander of the 339th Infantry Division, killed in January 18, 1942
- Colonel Hans Berger, commander of the 18th Artillery Regiment, killed, February 9
- Colonel August-Heinrich Wassmuth, C.O. of the 413th Infantry Regiment, killed on February 23
- Major General Cord von Buelow, commander of the 10th Rifle Brigade, killed near Vitebsk, March 1
- Colonel Botho von Frantzius, commander of the 504th Infantry Regiment, killed at Nevel, March 14
- Lieutenant General Otto Gabcke, C.O. of the 294th Infantry Division, killed, March 22
- Major General Bruno Hippler, commander of the 329th Infantry Division, killed, March 23
- Lieutenant General Kurt Himer, the conqueror of Copenhagen and commander of the 46th Infantry Division, mortally wounded on March 26 and died in the hospital at Simferopol on April 4
- Major General Karl Fischer, C.O., 267th Infantry Division, killed on March 31
- and Major General Franz Scheidies, commander of the 61st Infantry Division, killed on April 7[17]

And there were dozens of others, killed or crippled by mortar fire, shot down by enemy snipers or machine guns or crushed beneath the

heavy Russian tanks. Others simply collapsed under the strain or were relieved of their commands for refusing to obey some senseless ''hold-at-all-costs'' order. Divisions were now often commanded by colonels, battalions were led by captains and lieutenants, and companies (or what was left of them) were frequently commanded by second lieutenants or sergeants. By late December, for example, the remnants of the 329th Infantry Regiment (162nd Infantry Division) were led by Lieutenant Scheel, until he, too, was wounded at the end of the year. The III Battalion of the 18th Infantry Regiment was now commanded by its senior surviving lieutenant, Count Franz Joseph von Kageneck, a young military genius. He was shot through the head during the street fighting at Schitinkovo on December 29, the day after he learned that his wife, the Princess of Bavaria, had given birth to twin sons. By the time the III/18th Infantry was taken out of the line, it was commanded by Lieutenant Rudi Becker—its only surviving officer, other than the battalion physician. Its total strength was two officers, five NCOs, and 22 men.[18]

By the end of 1941, the German soldiers looked on the wounded as lucky, provided their wounds were not too serious but were severe enough to earn them an evacuation to the rear or—best of all—a trip to the Fatherland. Willi Nolden, a *Landser* (the German equivalent and companion in misfortune to the British ''Tommy'' or American ''G.I.''), was hit in the hand by a piece of shrapnel. ''I'll give you a thousand marks for your hand!'' one of his buddies joked to him, because he knew that Nolden was going home. (Until almost the end of the war, any German soldier who spent eight consecutive weeks in the hospital was given four weeks' medical leave in Germany.)

By December 22, the Soviet 49th Army had broken through the center of 4th Army's front and XXXXIII Corps was in danger of being encircled. Kluge appealed to Hitler several times to allow it to retreat and finally obtained permission on the afternoon of the 23rd. Meanwhile, in Guderian's sector, the Soviets broke through Lieutenant General Wilhelm Stemmermann's 296th Infantry Division in several places, and the commander of the 2nd Panzer Army had two choices: disobey Hitler's orders and pull back the 296th Infantry, or sacrifice it to a senseless command. Guderian pulled it back, opening up a 25-mile gap in the German line. The following morning, Kluge signaled Halder that Guderian had withdrawn without authorization. Halder, who at this time was also parroting Hitler's orders, declared that Guderian should be court-martialed. Guderian was relieved of his command the next day (Christmas Day) and was replaced by Rudolf Schmidt, who was promoted to colonel general on January 1. Also on Christmas Day, General of Mountain Troops Ludwig Kuebler took command of the 4th Army. It had taken him almost a week to reach his headquarters.

(When Kluge moved up to army group command, General Reinhardt had been named acting commander of the 4th Army, but the weather was so bad that he could not reach army headquarters, even by sled. Kluge retained command of both the army and army group until Kuebler could reach his new headquarters.)

The next day, the temperatures fell to −25° F. The German Army was practically immobilized. Infantry marching on the roads could only cover a maximum of eight miles a day, and motorized infantry could cover a maximum of 20—on the roads. At the front, it took four days for an infantry battalion to shift 12 miles, but the Russians, equipped with skis, sleds, and horses, moved much more quickly and were soon in the rear of Army Group Center in several points. The Germans were amazed at the Russians' ability to live in the open under such conditions. West of Volokolamsk, in the zone of the 4th Panzer Group, Ruoff's V Corps was on the point of collapse, and Hoepner had to send in his last replacement battalion. It had just arrived from the Reich, was clad in shoes, and was armed only with pistols. Strauss's 9th Army was also near the point of collapse and was in danger of being surrounded at Rzhev, and General Kuebler was planning the defense of his own headquarters. On December 30, Kluge telephoned Hitler and asked for freedom of action. It was refused. Army Group Center was to hold its present positions without thought of withdrawal, the Fuehrer declared.

Despite the odds against them and the chaotic situation in the rear, the frontline units and their rear guards generally fought on with great courage and saved much of the German Army from destruction. The 3rd SS Engineer Battalion, for example, held the Lowat River bridge at Korowitschina for more than a week against three Soviet Guard regiments, two battalions of ski troops, and approximately 30 tanks. They faced constant mortaring, artillery fire, dive-bomber strikes, and human wave attacks almost every day, and the fighting was often hand-to-hand. After a week, the battalion was surrounded and had to be resupplied by air drop. The unit commander, SS Lieutenant Colonel Karl Ullrich, was everywhere, standing with his men throughout the thickest fighting. ''Always calm and composed despite the desperate situation, his steadfastness and confidence, his concern for his men's welfare and his own gallantry gave them the strength to hold out,'' Gordon Williamson wrote later. On February 19, Ullrich received word that he had been awarded the Knight's Cross. He signaled back that he would rather have fresh reinforcements. When he finally broke out on the night of February 22–23, he left nearly 2,000 Russian soldiers lying dead on the battlefield.[20] The 3rd SS Engineer Battalion probably had fewer than 300 men when the battle began.

Near Wyborgskaja, Corporal Bruno Sassen of the 3rd Parachute Regiment exhibited similar tenacity and held his position despite

tremendous odds. Then, realizing that the Russians were massing for an overwhelming attack, Sassen infiltrated through their frontline with his five remaining men. Then they jumped up and attacked the Soviet assembly area with machine pistols blazing. Taken by surprise, the Russians bolted and ran. The next day, many of the demoralized and leaderless Red survivors surrendered to the paratroopers.[21]

Part of the stubborn German resistance was due to the courage of desperation and can be directly attributed to Soviet brutality. No one wanted to surrender to the Russians. It was well known that they frequently tortured and murdered prisoners and mutilated the bodies of the wounded. During the retreat from Rostov, for example, they captured a German hospital. They threw the wounded out into the snow, poured buckets of cold water on them and left them to die; then they killed the doctors and raped and murdered the nurses. Their behavior toward their own people was often equally barbaric. Nina Markovna was a pretty Russian girl in her late teens whose 48-year-old father had been drafted into the Red Army before her village was captured by the Wehrmacht. When Stalin's counteroffensive reached the edge of her village, however, Nina's mother knew what to expect. ''Those drunken soldiers are more scared of tuberculosis than bullets,'' she cried to her daughter. ''What followed was an elaborate masquerade,'' Nina recalled.

I became a tuberculosis-wasted girl lying in bed, a hanging sheet meant to protect others in the home from the infectious germs. I held a bloodstained handkerchief with countless bright spots of blood spattered on the top sheet near my face—blood that Slava [her younger brother] had donated by cautiously cutting his leg.... Uneven red spots on my cheeks were there with the help of juice from a grated beet, diluted with water.

The Red Army entered the village about noon. ''Piercing, animal-like screams from the women rose in an anguished chorus. The children began to cry ... dishes were heard breaking, windows shattered with rifle butts, sacks of food were dragged out of the apartments,'' Nina recalled

''Leave us some food! We'll starve!'' one civilian begged.

''So starve, bastards!' a soldier shouted back. ''Greeting the fascists German dogs with bread and salt!''

Three soldiers broke into Nina's apartment but halted when they saw the ''dying'' girl. ''Poor child, dying of tuberculosis. Not long now,'' her mother said. ''Mama ... thirsty,'' Nina whined. The leading soldier spat on her and left, followed by his comrades.

Mother threw herself on her knees by my bed and wept in prayerful gratitude ... I, too, prayed—a bit ashamed that even as I prayed for my own deliverance,

someone else was being raped. That someone was my neighbor, Nadia, and the girl's screams filled the air.''[22]

Small wonder that the Germans fought so desperately to avoid capture.

The comradeship of the unit also played a decisive (if unquantifiable) role in the salvation of Army Group Center. Martin Roller recalls:

> The greater the pressure on a unit, the more it held together, Soldiers at the front had an especially close relationship. Your outfit was almost like a family.... I believe that even if there were no more goals, even if you saw that it was pointless and that everything was over, you would have kept on fighting so as not to shame yourself in front of your comrades. You had to stick together to survive.[23]

Back in the Reich, everyone was alarmed over the German Army's first major defeat. On December 20, Goebbels addressed the nation on public radio and announced that because winter had come earlier than expected, the Wehrmacht was not prepared for the winter campaign in Russia; therefore, between December 27 and January 4, a gigantic collection of equipment and clothing for the armed forces would be conducted by the party.

Swedish journalist Arvid Fredborg recalled hearing sarcastic remarks as to whether or not it was reasonable to expect winter in December, but nevertheless ''catastrophe was in the air. The prospect of the Russian masses welling over into Europe made even the most fanatical anti-Nazi prepared for sacrifice. The collection campaign actually produced a moral shake-up.''[24] During the collection campaign, the German people voluntarily donated 1.5 million furs and skins and 67 million woolen garments. Much of it was collected by the Hitler Youth. It was a major propaganda victory for the party, although it did the soldiers no good for some time. The vehicle losses and the chaotic state of the Russian railroads meant that only supplies of the highest priority reached the frontline troops. These included ammunition, food, and very little else. Sergeant Pabst of the hard-pressed 129th Infantry Division and his lice-infested men did receive some blankets from Germany in February 1942. He recalled that they smelled clean. ''You could see the parlor with the sofa,'' he wrote, ''or the child's bed, or perhaps the young girl's room from which they came. We held them in our hands for a moment, smiling. How far away it all seemed, it could have been on another planet.''[25]

At dawn on New Year's Day, 1942, the temperature stood at −25° F. In Rastenburg, Adolf Hitler raised 3rd and 4th Panzer Group to army status, no doubt to improve their morale. General Reinhardt tartly noted that his command was more nearly a corps than an army in

terms of strength. Since June 22, the Wehrmacht had been decimated. It had lost 173,722 men killed, 621,308 wounded, and 35,873 missing. According to Halder, losses on the Eastern Front in 1941 totaled 25.96 percent of the 3.2 million men engaged.[26]

The New Year brought another crisis of confidence between the Army and the Fuehrer. On January 2, Adolf Hitler was furious because General Strauss had ordered a withdrawal without his authorization. General Halder recalled his ''mad outbursts'' and how ''OKH is charged with having introduced parliamentary procedures in the army, and with lacking incisiveness of direction. These ravings interspersed with utterly baseless accusations waste our time and undermine any effective cooperation.'' Halder also noted that Kluge was ''at the end of his wits.'' The next day he recorded, ''Another dramatic scene with the Fuehrer, who calls in question the generals' courage to make hard decisions. The plain truth however is that with the temperature down to thirty below freezing our troops simply cannot hold any longer.''[27]

The troops certainly were nearing exhaustion. One man, who did an hour's outpost duty every three hours, wrote, ''Sleep comes in snatches; in 48 hours I have slept for eight. Not all nights are as quiet as this one.''[28] The junior officers also performed miracles. One of his men wrote of Lieutenant von Hindenburg, the descendent of the famous military family and an company commander:

> Strain has drawn rings under his eyes. In moments when he thinks he's not being watched, a great tiredness overcomes him and he grows quite numb. But as soon as he takes the receiver in his hand, his quiet low voice is clear and firm. He talks to his platoon commanders with such convincing warmth and confidence that they go away reassured. His own courage is self-sufficient, he wears it as naturally as his uniform.[29]

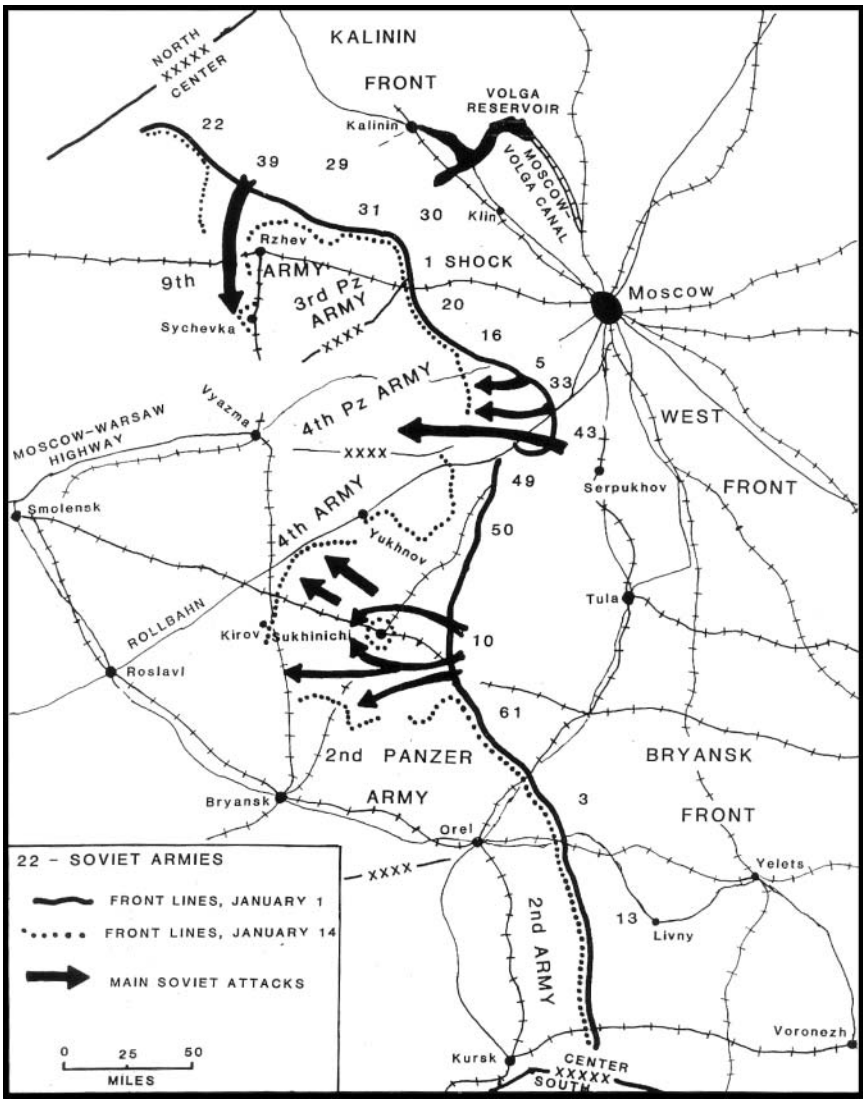
Meanwhile, three new divisions arrived by rail to reinforce Army Group Center. At the front, the Soviet 10th Army bypassed Sukinichi, surrounding 4,000 German troops in the process. On January 2, the Soviets broke through 4th Army and, by January, 8, XX Corps was threatened with encirclement. In vain, Hoepner begged Kluge for permission to allow it to retreat, but the field marshal refused to sanction it, because Hitler would not approve. Hoepner then ordered the retreat on his own responsibility. At 11:30 P.M. that same evening, Hoepner was relieved of his command on Hitler's personal orders—one of more than 30 generals he would dismiss before the spring of 1942. Hitler also instructed that he be expelled from the army with loss of retirement pay and benefits and the rights to wear the uniform and his decorations. (Hoepner took his case to the army courts, which upheld his contention that he could not be deprived of his pay or rights without a

court-martial. This Hitler did not wish to risk, so Hoepner continued to draw full pay and lived in a garrison house until he was arrested for his part in the July 20, 1944, attempt on Hitler's life.) Richard Ruoff succeeded Hoepner as commander of the 4th Panzer Army.

As New Years approached, it was still highly doubtful that Army Group Center could survive until the spring thaw, and there were several major crisis points in its zone. One of the main objectives of the Soviet offensive was now Vyazma, a small railroad city 125 miles west of Moscow and 90 miles east of Smolensk. Its railroads ran due north to Rzhev, south to Bryansk, northeast to Moscow, and southeast to Kaluga and Tula, carrying the bulk of the supplies bound for the 3rd Panzer, 9th, 4th Panzer, and 4th Armies. During the critical battles of early 1942, it was the key to survival for Army Group Center. Figure 32.1 shows the Battle of Moscow and Army Group Center's deteriorating situation from January 1 to 14, 1942.

On the German left flank, the major crisis developed around Rzhev, where the 9th Army was in danger of being encircled and where VI Corps alone was under attack by three Soviet armies. The Reds opened a gap northwest of Rzhev before nightfall on January 2, but the temperature dropped to −40° F that night. The Soviet troops, fighting in the open, were not invulnerable to the cold, particularly when the temperatures fell this low. Consequently, they were unable to exploit the Rzhev gap the following day. By now, 9th Army had partially clothed itself in furs and felt boots (taken from Russian civilians) and had figured out ways of keeping warm in the cold temperatures. One battalion collected the bodies of 73 frozen Russian soldiers. It sawed their legs off at the knees, put them in ovens until they thawed, removed their felt-lined boots, and gave them to German soldiers. This battalion had been so depleted by casualties that this desperate measure provided footwear for almost every man in the unit.[30] Even so, the situation remained desperate. On January 5, the Soviet 39th Army burst into the rear of and behind the 9th Army. Strauss countered by committing his last reserves: the SS Cavalry Brigade, which was led by SS Major General Hermann Fegelein, a noted horseman and womanizer who had no military qualifications for his post. His troops fought well but ran out of ammunition and were forced to withdraw on the afternoon of January 8. Four Soviet divisions pushed into the rear of 9th Army, with nothing between them and the Vyazma-Rzhev railroad—the lifeline of the 9th Army. On the afternoon of January 12, they attacked Sychevka (Strauss's headquarters) and 9th Army's staff had to defend its own command post. On the right flank of 3rd Panzer Army, V Corps was under Soviet armored attack and was slowly bleeding to death, losing village after village. It was almost out of fuel, rations, and ammunition. Before nightfall, Reinhardt signaled Kluge and threatened

Figure 32.1
The Battle of Moscow, January 1–14, 1942



to give the order to retreat himself, if Army Group Center did not do so.

Sychevka fell on the afternoon of January 13, and 9th Army's main supply line was cut. That afternoon, 4th Army's main *Rollbahn* (main

supply road) was also cut and four of Kuebler's five corps were effectively surrounded.

By January 15, the situation had become so bad that even Hitler was forced to admit that his ''stand-fast'' order no longer had any basis in reality, so he authorized a general withdrawal. Most of the supplies 4th Army received for the next few days were flown in by Ju-52s. On the 19th, General Kuebler had enough and reported himself sick, and was replaced by General of Infantry Gotthard Heinrici, the commander of the XXXXIII Corps. Heinrici had spent 36 years in the service. He was not a dynamically inspirational leader in the same sense that Guderian, Rommel, or Patton were, but he inspired a quiet confidence in his soldiers, who considered him as solid as a rock and felt that there was no situation too difficult for him to master. Heinrici did, in fact, exhibit a sure hand in all of the many crisis he was called on to overcome. With this tough, stoic, and extremely competent veteran in charge, the sagging morale of the 4th Army instantly recovered.

The faith that the soldiers had in General Heinrici was fully justified by subsequent events. The temperature on January 21st was −40° F, and there was no fighting until the next day, when it rose to −10° F. On the 22nd, Heinrici committed Major General Hans Zorn's XXXX Panzer Corps to clearing the Rollbahn and simultaneously launched a surprise attack against Zhukov with General Friedrich Kirchner's LVII Panzer Corps. Both maneuvers were successful. Zorn reestablished a narrow corridor to the rear and, despite the Soviet forces behind his frontlines, Heinrici was able to keep his divisions supplied and conduct a staged retreat. He successfully evacuated the Yukhnov salient in phases and reestablished his army's line behind the Ugra on March 6.

RZHEV

Meanwhile, to the north, 3rd Panzer and 4th Panzer Armies put up a fierce defense on the Lama-Ruza River Line, bringing the right flank of Zhukov's West Front to an abrupt halt. Except for a few local retreats, Reinhardt and Ruoff were able to hold their positions throughout the rest of the winter—although just barely.

Following Heinrici's assumption of command of 4th Army, the most dangerous sector in Army Group Center was around Rzhev, where the badly outnumbered 9th Army was again on the verge of disaster. So far, it had survived this long almost solely because of the courage of its individual soldiers, NCOs, and officers. One sergeant recalled what happened when his division was attacked by five Soviet divisions:

[W]e reached the limit of human endurance. And yet I saw moving instances of valor and courage. There was a staff-sergeant who in all those days stood

like a rock in no-man's land: he never once left his post, never once let his machine-gun jam, but roared at his men to stand their ground. There was a red-bearded sergeant who didn't make a sound when they dressed his wounds, who laughed and called out cheerfully, as two comrades held him up: ''I'll soon be back, sir!'' And then there was a tall company commander who would edge himself slowly above the parapet, take aim carefully and fire, saying ''Round away,'' just as if he were on a rifle range. Such men still exist, and they can be worth more than a whole company.[31]

On January 14, Kluge earmarked Headquarters, XXXXVI Panzer Corps and the ''Das Reich'' SS Motorized Division for transfer from the 4th Panzer to the 9th Army, transferred Major General Walter Krueger's veteran 1st Panzer Division from the 3rd Panzer Army to the 9th, and replaced 9th Army commander General Strauss with General of Panzer Troops Walter Model, the commander of the XXXXI Panzer Corps.

Model was the very best of the ''Nazi generals'' on the Eastern Front in the winter of 1941–42. In appearance, he looked like an arrogant East Prussian general from an earlier era, complete with his ever-present monocle. He was, however, an indefatigable leader and a brilliant tactician who was well liked by his men, with whom he was quite friendly. On the other hand, he was often harsh and frequently unreasonable when dealing with his officers. Later he was to receive the nickname ''the Fuehrer's fireman,'' because he was only used in the most critical and dangerous situations.

The situation at Rzhev was certainly critical when Model arrived at 9th Army's Headquarters on January 18. The Soviets had already pushed through the 100-mile gap between the 9th Army and the 16th Army of Army Group North and were now west of Rzhev. Ninth Army was defending in three directions, and the Russian 9th Cavalry Corps was heading in the direction of Vyazma, the vital rail junction for three German armies. Fortunately for the 9th Army, the Soviets were also in trouble. They had been on the offensive for a month and a half in the dead of winter; they were also having serious supply troubles (having outrun their supply lines) and were experiencing heavy casualties due to the cold and due to poor and inexperienced leadership at all levels. Model took advantage of the Russian weaknesses and of the reinforcements he had received from Kluge to launch a counterattack at Sychevka, and by January 20 the 1st Panzer Division had reopened the railroad all the way to Rzhev. On January 22 and 23, the VI Corps, spearheaded by the ''Das Reich'' SS Division, pushed forward west of Rzhev and made contact with the spearheads of the XXIII Corps. This breakthrough also severed the two ''snow roads'' over which the Russians were resupplying the 39th and 29th Armies, as well as the XI Cavalry Corps. If contact could not be reestablished,

these forces were doomed. For the 29th Army, the end came quickly. On January 30, von Vietinghoff's XXXXVI Panzer Corps launched a surprise attack from Sychevka, covered 30 miles in six days, and by February 5 had the 29th Army surrounded in a tight pocket southeast of Rzhev. The Kalinin Front launched a desperate offensive to rescue it, but in vain. After several breakout attempts, the 29th collapsed on February 20.

Realizing that the success of his winter offensive was in danger, Stalin reactivated West Theater under Zhukov on February 1. It controlled the Kalinin, West, and Bryansk Fronts, but this move came too late to have much of an impact on the campaign. By February 6, Army Group Center had halted its retreat and sealed most of the major gaps in its front. The Soviet 33rd, 39th, and 29th Armies were either cut off, isolated, or surrounded, along with the 11th Cavalry, 1st Guards Cavalry, and 4th Airborne Corps. Stavka, however, was not convinced that the Germans could not be destroyed. On February 16, it reinforced Zhukov with two guards rifle corps, 10 rifle divisions, two airborne brigades, 60,000 additional replacements, and 200 tanks. The quality of these reinforcements was low, however, and many lacked adequate military training. On the other hand, all of Army Group Center's units were seriously depleted. By February 16, for example, 2nd Panzer Army was down to a strength of 45 operational tanks—less than the peacetime components of a panzer battalion.[32]

In repeated attacks, Zhukov hurled his Kalinin Front against the 9th Army; the 43rd, 49th, and 50th Armies against Heinrici's 4th Army; and the 16th and 61st Armies against Schmidt's 2nd Panzer. The German line held firm. The crisis had passed.

After the Red armies had exhausted themselves all along the German front, Army Group Center now went about the business of liquidating the Soviet forces cut off in their impetuous and unsystematic raids and breakthroughs. With the no immediate crisis to deal with, Kluge was able to withdraw some of his combat units from the front to handle this task. (Zhukov did launch several more attacks, but none seriously threatened Army Group Center.) During the first week in March, the 5th Panzer Division (Major General Gustav Fehn) smashed and destroyed a large part of the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps south of Vyazma. Then the rest of the V Corps went over to the offensive, pushing through watery snow and mud, slowly encircling and crushing the Soviet 33rd Army, which ceased to exist on April 15. Its commander committed suicide.

By now, the *rasputitsa*—the spring thaw—was setting in. During the winter, the ground (saturated by the fall rains) had frozen to a depth of eight feet or more, and several feet of ice and snow had accumulated on top of that. Now it began to melt from the top downward,

creating a progressively deepening layer of water and mud on top of frozen ground. The water could not go anywhere until the lowest layer of frozen soil had completely thawed, a process that usually took five or six weeks. During the worst three weeks of the rasputitsa, the mud was too deep for movement by motorized vehicles, or even by horse-drawn vehicles, other than panje wagons (which had high wheels and low weight). By mid-April, operations were virtually at a standstill throughout the zone of Army Group Center. Stalin's first winter offensive was over.

ARMY GROUP SOUTH

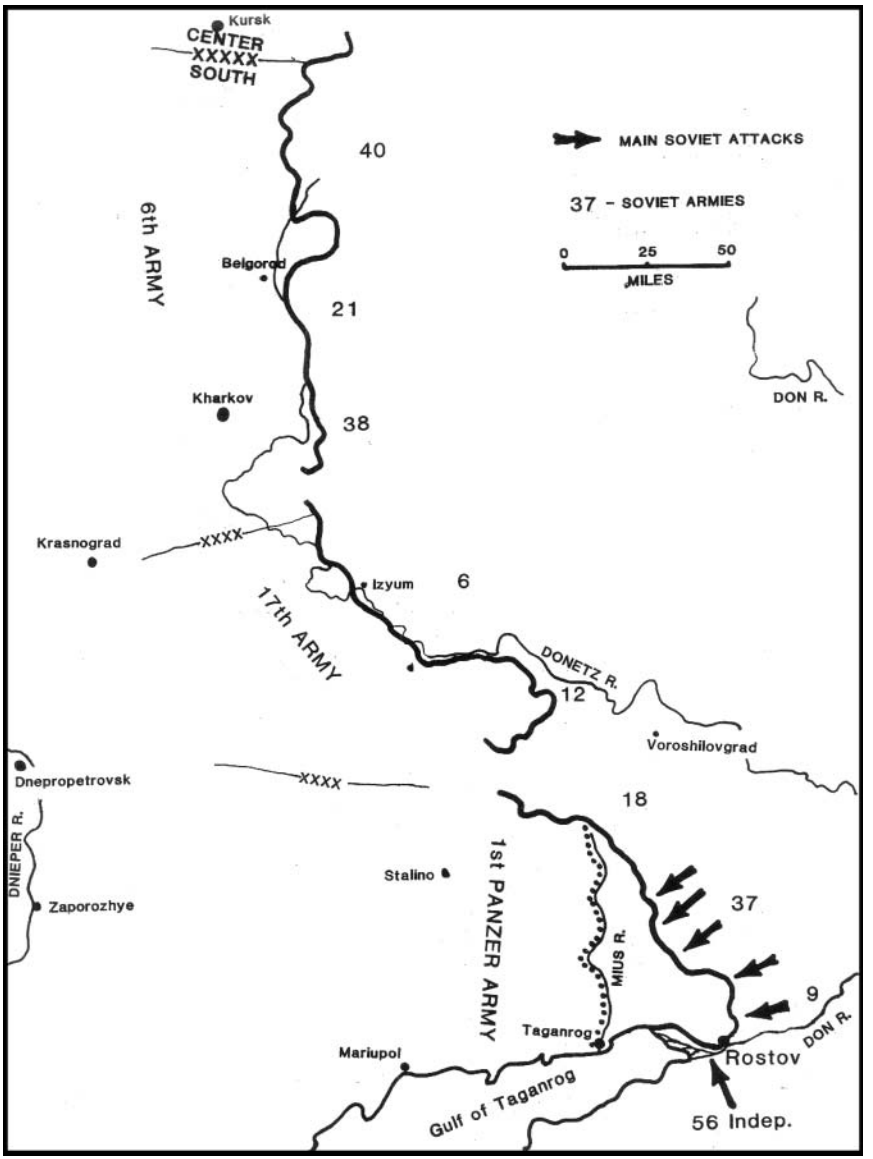
And what was happening in the zones of the other army groups while the divisions of Kluge and Zhukov were exhausting themselves west of Moscow?

To the south, Kleist's 1st Panzer Army captured Rostov on November 21, but it was immediately counterattacked by 10 Soviet divisions (see Figure 32.2). Then the Red armies shifted their attacks to the north, against Kleist's overextended left flank, where the XIV Panzer Corps was attacked by three Soviet armies. Kleist had no choice but to shift his 13th and 14th Panzer Divisions to the north and northwest, to avert disaster. Then, on November 25, Marshal Timoshenko launched his main attack with 21 divisions against General of Cavalry Eberhard von Mackensen's III Panzer Corps (the SS Motorized Division ''Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler'' (SS-LAH) and the 60th Motorized Infantry Division), which was defending Rostov itself. The Don River, which would have been a tremendous defensive asset in summer, was frozen solid, many of the line companies were down to one-third of their authorized strength, and those that were left were still dressed in summer uniforms. Even so, the two German divisions held on for three days, in temperatures of −14° F. On November 28, just as he had predicted, Kleist was forced to evacuate Rostov.

Adolf Hitler was not at the *Wolfsschanze*, his Rastenburg headquarters, at the time. When he did return on November 30, he learned that von Kleist (with Rundstedt's permission) had ordered III Panzer Corps to withdraw behind the Mius River, 45 miles west of Rostov.

Hitler, of course, was opposed to such a move, and browbeat Brauchitsch into ordering Rundstedt to hold his positions. On November 30, the commander-in-chief of Army Group South signaled back to Hitler that his order was ''madness.'' If the Fuehrer did not rescind it, Rundstedt's dispatch continued, he should find someone else to carry it out. At 2 A.M. that very night Gerd von Rundstedt was relieved of his command and replaced by Field Marshal Walter von Reichenau.[33]

Figure 32.2
Army Group South, November 28 to December 3, 1941



Lieutenant General Friedrich Paulus (who was promoted to general of panzer troops on January 1, 1942), the deputy chief of the General Staff of the Army and Reichenau's former chief of staff, was chosen to command 6th Army.

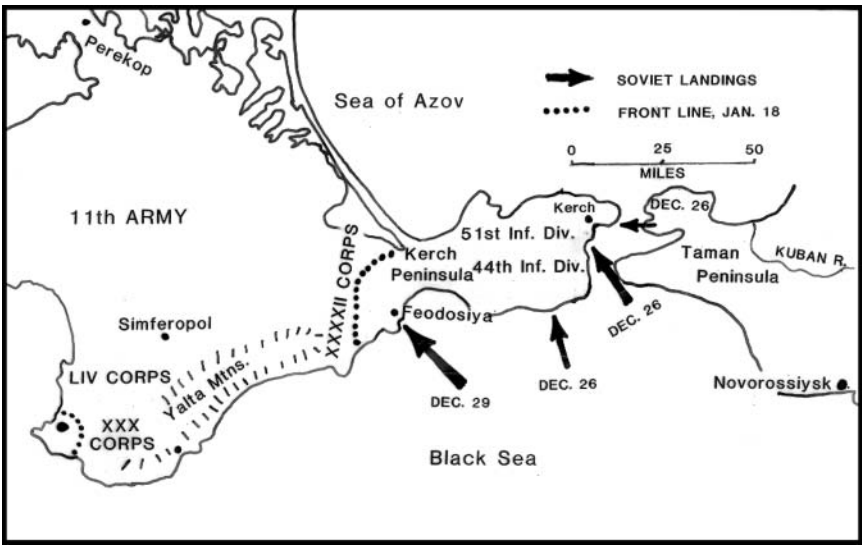
Reichenau initially insisted that Kleist hold his present positions but, at 3:30 P.M. on December 1, reversed himself and allowed Kleist to complete his withdrawal to the Mius during the night of December 1–2. That morning, Hitler flew to Kleist's headquarters at Mariupol on the Black Sea. As soon as he landed he conferred with *SS-Obergruppenfuehrer* (General of SS) Sepp Dietrich, the commander of the Leibstandarte. This conversation saved the careers of Rundstedt, Kleist, and Colonel Kurt Zeitzler, the chief of staff of the 1st Panzer Army. Hitler had already decided to sack the last two until Dietrich frankly told him that he had been wrong on the Rostov issue and wrong to fire Rundstedt. If an army general had told him this, Hitler would probably have flown into a tirade or (at best) ignored him. But he believed his old party comrade, Dietrich. Halder described the entire incident as ''a senseless waste of strength and time, and to top it, we lost von Rundstedt also.''[34]

The next crisis occurred on the Crimea. The 11th Army (under Manstein since Ritter Eugen von Schobert was killed on August 30) had overrun most of the peninsula in November, but the Soviets continued to hold the naval fortress of Sevastopol, one of the most heavily fortified places in the world. Manstein besieged it with his XXX and LIV Corps. He planned to launch an all-out offensive against the place that winter, using six of his seven German divisions. The task of defending the 170 miles of coastline from Yalta to Kerch (that is, east of Sevastopol) he assigned to Count von Sponeck's XXXXII Corps, which controlled only the German 46th Infantry Division and three Romanian brigades, plus a few corps troops.

Eleventh Army began its attack on Sevastopol on the morning of December 17, and by the end of the day, the 22nd Air Landing Division had penetrated the Outer Perimeter, the first of the three defensive rings around the city. By the 22nd, it had cracked the Main Line (the middle defensive belt), but the Soviets brought up reinforcements by sea and launched heavy counterattacks, pinning down the 22nd Division. Then, in the early morning darkness of December 26, the Soviet Azov Naval Flotilla began landing troops of the 51st Army along a 40-mile strip on the eastern end of the Kerch Peninsula (see Figure 32.3). Count von Sponeck did not have enough troops to counterattack every landing, so he struck systematically. By the morning of December 29, he had wiped out two major beachheads and was planning to attack another, when the Soviet Navy landed some 5,000 troops at Feodosiya within two hours. By the next morning, it had 20,000 troops ashore and was depositing more every hour. Sponeck had little choice but to order a general withdrawal.

The retreat of the 46th Infantry was extremely difficult. Only 250 of its 1,400 motorized vehicles were operational, and the men had to

Figure 32.3
The Soviet Kerch Offensive, December 26, 1941 to January 18, 1942



march through a driving sleet and snow storm, in below-zero temperatures. Vehicles that skidded into ditches could not be pulled out, and many others broke down. Major General Kurt Himer, the divisional commander, ordered that the equipment that could not be carried to the rear be abandoned; in his view, his mission was to save as many of his men as possible, before the Soviets could drive across the Kerch Peninsula and cut off his retreat. The 46th left behind a trail of abandoned equipment as it headed west, and the retreat deteriorated into a shambles. The mobile elements of the division were already northwest of Feodosiya when orders arrived from Manstein to attack the Soviet bridgehead. Himer dutifully turned about and attacked Feodosiya on December 31, without artillery support. The infantry put forth little effort, and that night the retreat continued.

On the last day of 1941, Manstein found that the 46th Infantry Division was now virtually valueless as a combat unit. It had lost 80 percent of its trucks, almost all of its engineer equipment, and half of its communications gear, as well as about 25 pieces of artillery and dozens of other weapons and items of equipment. He hurriedly cancelled his assault on Sevastopol and began sending regiments to the east. He was slowed down by weather, but on January 15, he launched a major attack with three German infantry divisions, as well a Romanian infantry division and two Romanian brigades. The two Soviet armies were

unable to check his assault, and, during the night of January 18–19, fell back into the isthmus and occupied a trench line left from the 1941 fighting. Manstein then switched over to the defensive on both of his fronts until the spring.

Meanwhile, Count von Sponeck was arrested for flagrantly disobeying Hitler's orders to hold at all costs. He was tried by court-martial (with Hermann Goering presiding) and was sentenced to death. Lieutenant General Walter von Seydlitz-Kurzbach, a member of the court, strongly protested the verdict, which may explain why the sentence was not carried out at the time. Sponeck was shot by the SS on Himmler's orders on July 23, 1944, three days after the Stauffenberg attempt on the Fuehrer's life. By that time, Seydlitz was in a Soviet prison.

Manstein ordered an investigation of the conduct of the 46th Infantry Division during its retreat. It was a source of embarrassment to him that a German division could be reduced to a wreck without having actually made contact with the enemy. Field Marshal von Reichenau, the new commander-in-chief of Army Group South, did not wait for the results of the inquiry. He stripped the division of its honor and decreed that its men would receive no promotions or decorations until it had redeemed itself in combat. Strangely enough, Lieutenant General Himer was not court-martialed and was only relieved of his command for 10 days. He was still command of the 46th when he was mortally wounded on March 26, 1942.

Reichenau's tenure as army group commander was destined to be short. On January 12, 1942, he went on his usual cross-country run of six or more miles in temperatures well below −20° F. Later that morning, in the mess hall, he collapsed with a severe heart attack. He was at the point of death on January 17 when it was decided to fly him back to Germany, on the thin chance that doctors there might be able to save his life. En route, the airplane crashed. We do not know if he died of heart failure or as a result of the injuries he suffered in the crash. Possibly it was a combination of the two; in any case, he was replaced by Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, who immediately officially restored the 46th Infantry Division to a state of honor.

ARMY GROUP NORTH

When Operation Barbarossa ended, the 18th Army of Field Marshal Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb's Army Group North was besieging Leningrad, and the 16th Army was covering its right flank and rear. In addition, Lieutenant General Juergen von Arnim's XXXIX Panzer Corps held Tikhvin, at the end of a 230-mile salient, and was dangerously overextended. Hitler, however, assured Leeb in October that the Moscow offensive would prevent the Soviets from counterattacking in his zone.

He was wrong. When Arnim attempted to advance north to the Svir River (to link up with the Finns), he was promptly counterattacked by Stalin's Siberian divisions. By November 25, XXXIX Panzer and its supporting I Corps were under attack from four Soviet armies. By December 7, when a blizzard descended on the battlefield, Arnim's badly outnumbered vanguard was almost surrounded at Tikhvin and had only five tanks left. That afternoon, Leeb ordered him to evacuate the town. He continued to hold the salient until December 15, when the temperature dropped to −33° F. That morning, Leeb telephoned Hitler and told him that he would have to give up the idea of holding positions near Tikhvin. Hitler objected, but Leeb insisted that he be allowed to withdraw 45 miles west, to the Volkhov River line. Hitler, as was often the case, could not make up his mind, so Leeb assumed that the decision was his, and at noon ordered von Arnim to begin his withdrawal. Several hours later, Keitel called Leeb and ordered him to stop the retreat, because Hitler had not made his decision. The frustrated marshal took matters into his own hands and flew to Fuehrer Headquarters that very afternoon.

The following morning, Hitler met with Leeb and agreed to the withdrawal from the Tikhvin salient without an argument. With Field Marshal Brauchitsch present, he blamed Army Group North's present predicament on OKH, which had given him bad advice, he said. He had suspected all along that Tikhvin could not be held, he declared. Hitler also blamed his decision to transfer 3rd Panzer Army to Army Group Center on bad advice from OKH. Leeb must have thought that he had landed in a lunatic asylum, but, since he had gotten what he wanted, he signaled Arnim to continue his withdrawal and flew back to his headquarters. On December 22, XXXIX Panzer Corps finally limped back through the ice and snow behind the Volkhov. It had been decimated. The 18th Motorized Division alone had lost 9,000 men in the Tikhvin operation and was reduced to a strength of 741—the size of a peacetime battalion.

The Soviet victory at Tikhvin saved Leningrad. With Tikhvin in their hands, the Reds were able to repair the railroad through that town and open connections from Lake Lagoda to points east, and ferry supplies across the lake to the city. It would not be operational until January, however, and, in the meantime, the people of the city starved. By early November, the average manual worker was receiving 400 grams (14.1 ounces) of bread per day—about 500 calories. Children and nonmanual workers received about half this amount. Most days there was no meat, milk, grains, or cereals available. On November 20, the rations were reduced to 250 grams (seven ounces) of bread a day for manual workers—about one-sixth of the minimum amount actually needed by the normal adult. Office workers, children, and other dependents got about

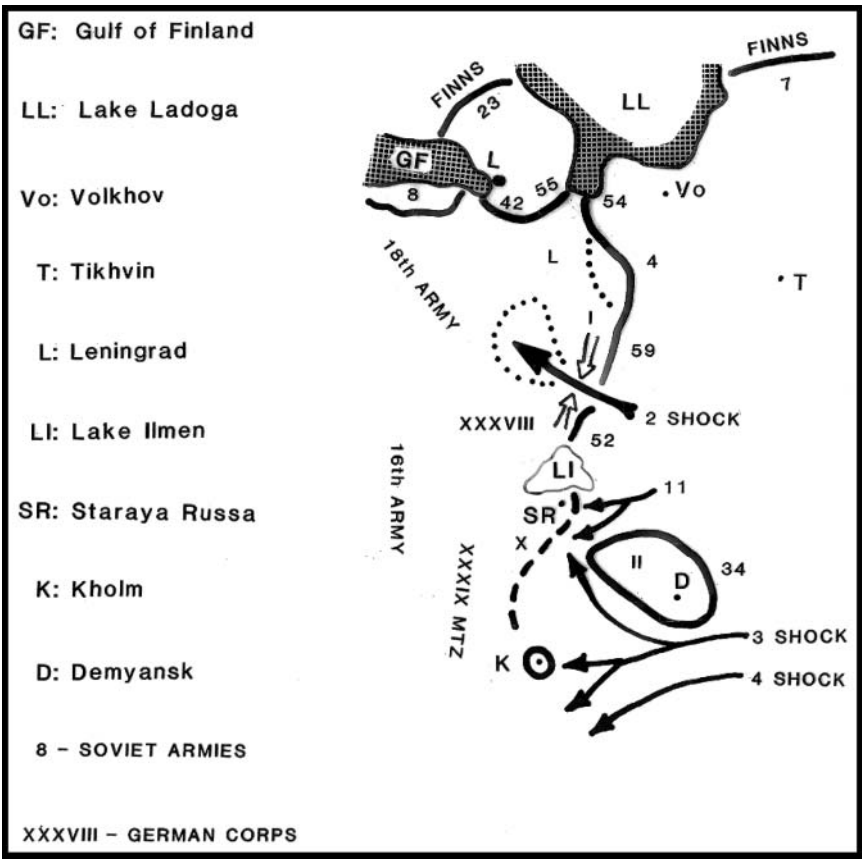
half this amount. Cattle and horse feed was now being issued to humans, who were glad to get it. Sheep guts were processed into jelly, flavored with herbs (to disguise the smell), and sold as part of the meat ration. Dogs and cats disappeared from the city, as did sparrows, rats, and mice. Even leather and glue was cooked and eaten; nevertheless, 11,000 people starved to death in November and 53,000 died in December, according to official figures. The actual number is not known, but it was much higher. Western historians have estimated that 1 million people starved to death during the Siege of Leningrad, and that figure excludes tens of thousands killed by artillery and bombs. Notices were posted on public bulletin boards, offering to sell furniture, clothing, jewelry, and even grand pianos for a few slices of bread. By the beginning of 1942, there were no takers. Finally, cannibalism broke out in the city. Soldiers—the best-fed people—were murdered on their way home from the front and eaten. It was rumored that children had begun to disappear, so families kept their youngsters off of the streets. Anyone who looked well fed and healthy was suspect. By the end of December, a third of the labor force was too weak to work.[35]

By January 1942, ice had formed on Lake Lagoda. Soon it was thick enough to support three-ton trucks, and a 60-mile-long ice road was constructed across the lake. Up to 400 three-ton trucks a day crossed the ice road, bringing in supplies and carrying out residents of the city. Some 221,000 civilians were evacuated in February alone. More than 1,000 vehicles were lost on the ice road, either to German airplanes or because the drivers got lost in snow storms and froze. Not a few trucks actually fell through the ice, which constantly shifted, and the route had to be adjusted accordingly.

In the meantime, Stalin's legions tried to break the siege.

The winter offensive in the sector of Army Group North began on January 7, 1942 (see Figure 32.4). It was ill-coordinated, but the weight of 11 Soviet armies was too much not to experience some success against 31 exhausted German divisions, some of which were still in summer uniforms. By January 13, General Vlasov's elite 2nd Shock Army had broken through the 16th Army on a 20-mile front between Novgorod and Chudovo and forced its way across the Volkhov. Temperatures in the northern sector now dropped as low as −49° F. Leeb was losing thousands of men to frostbite and wounded soldiers were freezing to death by the score because of the lack of blankets. The marshal committed his last reserves, but still the Reds continued to gain ground. Headquarters, 281st Security Division (under Lieutenant General Theodor Scherer) was on the verge of being surrounded at Kholm with 5,500 men, and II Corps (General Count von Brockdorff-Ahlefeldt) and elements of the II Corps were threatened with encirclement at Demyansk. On January 12, Leeb asked permission to pull II Corps back

Figure 32.4
Army Group North, January to March 1942



and conduct a general retreat to the Lovat River. Hitler refused to abandon Demyansk, because he believed that such salients tied down more Russians than Germans. Leeb, who by now was wondering aloud whether Hitler and Stalin were not secretly allied against the German Army, refused to accept this reasoning.[36] On January 16, he asked to be relieved of his command. He was replaced the next day by Colonel General von Kuechler. General of Cavalry Georg Lindemann assumed command of the 18th Army.

The winter offensive in the northern sector was a battle for the control of the crossroads, of which there were only a few. Kuechler simply did not have enough men to hold a continuous line against the massive Russian assaults, so he tried to hold the major road junctions,

reasoning that, without control of the primitive road net, the Reds would not be able to resupply their spearheads once the spring thaw set in. He was exactly right in this prediction.

Kholm was surrounded on January 22 and Demyansk (20 miles southeast of Staraya Russa) was encircled on February 9, forming a pocket 20 miles deep and 40 miles wide, with a garrison of six divisions and 103,000 men. Both garrisons were supplied solely by the Luftwaffe, despite terrible casualties to the weather, Soviet anti-aircraft fire, and the fighters of the Red Air Force. Another Soviet drive was stopped just north of Novgorod, and the Soviet attacks on Starva Russa (the main supply depot of 16th Army) were turned back only after hand-to-hand fighting in the streets.

For all of their efforts and the seemingly impressive amount of ground they had gained, the Soviets had not forced the Germans to relax their grip on Leningrad one notch since the fall of Tikhvin. Halder, for one, was appalled by the poor Soviet tactical execution, which he dubbed ''senseless.'' ''Unable to conceive that the Stavka would deliberately fritter away strength in secondary attacks,'' Ziemke and Bauer wrote, ''Hitler, Halder, and Kuechler concluded that the main blow was yet to come.... They were wrong. The 'brawl' was going to continue.''[37]

Had the Red armies in the northern sector exhibited any tactical skill at all, Army Group North probably would have been smashed. As events worked out, they gained thousands of square miles of useless forests and swamps, but all of the key positions remained in German hands.

Throughout the winter of 1941–42, Army Group North had resorted to patchwork measures to prevent or contain Soviet breakthroughs and to hold strongpoints. By early March, however, the Soviets had generally shot their bolt and Kuechler was able to begin a series of counterattacks, designed to destroy the Russian penetrations and reestablish his line. On March 15, he launched his most ambitious offensive, designed to cut off General Andrey Vlasov's elite 2nd Shock Army in the Volkhov salient. The mouth of the bulge was only six miles long, and it was attacked on the northern face by elements of the I Corps, and on the southern edge by XXXVIII Corps. The 58th Infantry Division spearheaded the southern attack, while the SS Motorized Division ''Police'' led the trust from the north. Russian resistance was extremely heavy and the temperature fell to −30° F, but the German forces joined hands late in the afternoon on March 19. The 2nd Shock Army was surrounded.

The attacks aimed at relieving Demyansk began two days later. Because they did not trust the pro-Nazi General Busch, Kuechler and Halder arranged to have the relief forces placed directly under the

control of Army Group North. Halder also considered the corps commanders involved (Christian Hansen of the X and Brockdorff of the II) as insufficiently strong for the task. As a result, Lieutenant General Walter von Seydlitz-Kurzbach, an arrogant but straight-laced and strong-willed minion of an old and legendary Prussian military family, was charged with the mission of forming a five-division battle group for the relief of the fortress. Within the pocket, Lieutenant General Hans Zorn was placed in charge of the forces that would break the encirclement and join hands with Seydlitz, when the relief force reached Ramushevo.

Against the Russians, Seydlitz used the loose order infiltration tactics pioneered by the Finnish Army to surround, bypass, and eliminate Soviet strongpoints. The Reds reacted with surprise, confusion, and disorganization. In some places, they fought like fanatics; in others, they collapsed altogether. The temperature rose above the freezing mark on March 23, and, after that, the snow melted rapidly. Seydlitz's leading regiments reached the Redya River, the halfway mark, on the fourth day of the offensive. Meanwhile, the Soviets fiercely struck at the Demyansk perimeter and dropped two parachute brigades inside the pocket. Progress was extremely limited the next four days, as the troops had to push through three feet of snow, covered by a foot and a half of water. On March 30, Seydlitz halted, regrouped, and shifted his main line of attack north to the Starya Russa-Demyansk Road. He resumed his advance on April 4, and it took eight days of heavy fighting to push six miles. By now he had suffered more than 10,000 casualties. On April 14, Zorn launched his counterattack, even though Seydlitz had not yet reached Ramushevo. His action was a bit of a gamble, but he felt it was necessary, because the rasputitsa would soon bring all operations to a halt.

The gamble paid off. Zorn and Seydlitz linked up on the Lovat River on April 20, restoring land contact between II Corps and the rest of the German Army. They consolidated their gains over the next few days and the first supply trucks rolled into the Demyansk salient on May 2.

Meanwhile, the 2nd Shock Army, ignoring the fact that it had been cut off, continued its relentless drive toward Lyuban. It pushed to within eight miles of the city before it was halted by I Corps and could go no further. To the northeast of Lyuban, the Soviet 54th Army pushed to within five miles of the town, but it was also stopped. The Russians had come very close to rescuing the 2nd Shock from the north, surrounding I Corps, and threatening the German hold on Leningrad, but they had failed by approximately 13 miles.

The Russians were unable to resupply 2nd Shock Army. By April 23, the pocket was beginning to shrink. Fighting continued until July,

but the 17 divisions and eight independent brigades trapped in the Volkhov Pocket were slowly crushed out of existence by the 18th Army. Most of the trapped Russians fought to the end, and only 32,000 allowed themselves to be taken alive. Among the prisoners was General Andrey Andreyevich Vlasov, who was captured (along with a female companion) by the pro-German headman of a Russian village and handed over to the Germans on July 11. The total Soviet losses totaled almost 100,000 men.

While the 18th Army mopped up the Russian forces trapped in the Volkhov swamps, General Theodor Scherer's Kholm garrison was near the end of its strength. It was now besieged by the entire 3rd Shock Army. The melting snow had filled its trenches to a depth of two feet with ice water, which froze the infantrymen to their bones. By the end of March, more than half of the garrison had been killed or wounded, and the Russians—determined to annihilate the stubborn defenders—launched up to eight attacks a day against the pocket. By May 1, the garrison had lost 1,550 dead and 2,200 wounded. That day, the Reds launched another full-scale assault and overran the eastern sector of the pocket. Kholm was saved only by the guns of the stalled relief force, the Stukas from the Luftwaffe, and the desperate courage of Scherer and his men.

It was the last thrust of the 3rd Shock Army. On May 5, a relief force from the 8th Panzer Division finally pushed its way into the pocket, breaking the siege after 96 days.

Like Army Groups Center and South, Army Group North had survived all of Stalin's attacks—barely.

NOTES

1. Halder Diaries, November 10, 1941.
2. Irving, *Hitler's War*, p. 360.
3. Ziemke and Bauer, p. 76.
4. Ibid., p. 82.
5. *True to Type*: *A Selection from Letters and Diaries of German Soldiers and Civilians Collected on the Soviet-German Front*. 1945, p. 39.
6. Carell, *Hitler Moves East*, p. 339.
7. Heinrich Haape, *Moscow Tram Stop* (1957), pp. 226–29 (hereafter cited as Haape).
8. Ziemke and Bauer, pp. 81–82.
9. Irving, *Hitler's War*, p. 351.
10. Paul Joseph Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries*, Louis P. Lochner, ed. and trans (1948; reprint ed., 1971), p. 157 (hereafter cited as Goebbels Diaries).
11. Halder Diaries, December 20, 1941.
12. Seaton, *Moscow,* pp. 211, 245.

13. Seaton, *Russo-German War*, pp. 225–26.
14. Ibid.
15. Foerster, ''Volkegemeinschaft,'' p. 210.
16. Geitner died in early 1942.
17. Keilig, p. 1 ff.
18. Haape, p. 343.
19. Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel, and Dennis Showalter, *Voices From the Third Reich* (1989), p. 144 (hereafter cited as Steinhoff et al.).
20. Gordon Williamson, *Infantry Aces of the Third Reich* (1991), p. 57 (hereafter cited as Willlamson, *Infantry Aces*).
21. Ibid.
22. Nina Markovna, *Nina's Journey* (1989).
23. Steinhoff et al., pp. 147–49.
24. Terry C. Charman, *The German Home Front, 1939–1945* (1989), p. 93 (hereafter cited as Charman).
25. Pabst, p. 54.
26. Halder Diaries, January 5, 1942.
27. Ibid., January 2 and 3, 1942.
28. Pabst, p. 46.
29. Ibid., p. 48.
30. Haape, p. 254.
31. Pabst, p.
32. Ziemke and Bauer, pp. 176–78.
33. Brett-Smith, p. 31; Seaton, Moscow, p. 172.
34. Halder Diaries, December 1, 1941.
35. Bethell, pp. 110–13.
36. Brett-Smith, p. 55.
37. Ziemke and Bauer, p. 149.

CHAPTER XXXIII
THE HOLOCAUST BEGINS

While the panzers surged across Russia to within sight of the Kremlin, an event of unprecedented horror occurred: the Holocaust—the systematic extermination of the European Jews—began.

No other aspect of the history of Nazi Germany is remembered so frequently or has defined the Third Reich so thoroughly as its program of genocide against the Jews. Called ''the Final Solution'' by those who engineered it, it destroyed most of European Jewry in a state-supported program of mass murder. Soon after the war, the Nuremberg Tribunal estimated that 4.5 to 5.5 million Jews had been murdered in the Holocaust. Subsequent research and the discoveries of more mass graves, however, have established that the first figure was far too conservative. Estimates of those killed now run between 5.5 million and 6 million, with the latter being a commonly accepted figure. At least 60 percent of the European Jews were put to death, but this estimate is probably conservative. Seventy percent is more likely, and the total may run as high as 75 percent.

The idea of exterminating an entire race, class of people, or ethnic group did not begin or—alas—end with Hitler. In the Middle Ages, for example, it was considered quite natural to try to annihilate unbelievers or heretics, an idea which led to the Spanish Inquisition and the Saint Batholomew massacre, when the French Catholics attempted (with some success) to exterminate the Huguenots. During the French Revolution, the Jacobins had as their objective the extermination of an entire class. The Russian revolutionaries of 1917–18 had a similar objective toward the ruling class; according to many reports, the sailors in Sevastopol and Odessa shot everybody who had clean fingernails.[1] The Turks murdered more than a million Armenians during their genocidal campaign in the 1920s, and Stalin murdered or was responsible for the deaths of somewhere in the neighborhood of 4.5 million Kulacks in the 1930s. Since the death of Hitler, the Soviets committed tens of

thousands of mass murders in Eastern Europe, the Chinese Communists murdered more than 1 million people, and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia murdered some 3 million of their own people, out of a population of 8 million. In an attempt to exterminate all opposition, they murdered anyone who wore glasses. Many readers could no doubt cite other examples of attempted extermination, the most recent of which may still be taking place in the former Yugoslavia or in the Dafur region of the Sudan. The Nazi efforts were different, however, because here, for the first time, the techniques of the Industrial Revolution were applied to mass murder, which made it even more terrifying. It involved mass murder on an assembly-line basis and, for some reason, the brain recoils at the thought. Even half a century later, the enormity of the horror is still hard to grasp.

Adolf Hitler hated the Jews since his boyhood in Linz and probably acquired the anti-Semitic virus from his father Alois, a harsh and violent man who subscribed to several anti-Jewish papers and journals. In 1920, very early in his rise to power, Hitler shocked Joseph Hell, a journalist with the weekly magazine *Der Gerade Weg* (The Straight Path) by saying,

> When I really am in power, then the annihilation of the Jews will be my first and most important task. As soon as I have the power to do it I shall, for example, have erected in the Marienplatz in Munich gallows and more gallows, as many as can be fitted in without stopping the traffic. Then the Jews will be hanged, one after another, and they will stay hanging, until they stink. They will hang as long as the principles of hygiene permit. As soon as they have been taken down, the next ones will be strung up, and this will continue until the last Jew in Munich is destroyed. The same thing will happen in the other cities until Germany is cleansed of the last Jews.[2]

Adolf Hitler was bitterly unhappy to have 503,000 Jews in Germany when he took power in 1933. He soon adopted a policy of emigration, and some 149,000 Jews did emigrate from Germany by the end of 1938, but then Hitler annexed Austria and, with it, 200,000 Jews. The bloodless conquest of the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia added 100,000 more—and then came Poland and 3 million more. The conquests of Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Greece, and Yugoslavia added tens of thousands more. Finally, the conquest of most of European Russia added approximately 3 million more Jews to Hitler's domain. In all, it has been estimated that perhaps 10 million Jews lived within the Nazi-occupied realm at the peak of its expansion period.

In the meantime, Hitler had reached the peak of his power and self-assurance. All of the forces that had restrained him before 1939 were dead, gone, or impotent. The political opposition had been suppressed;

Hindenburg was in his grave, and the forces he represented were neutralized, eliminated, or actively collaborating with the regime. Minister of Economics Hjalmar Schacht had been sacked; the press had been muzzled and the German people now heard only what the Fuehrer and Goebbels wanted them to hear; international opinion no longer meant anything to Hitler; the dissident generals (Hammerstein, Beck, von Witzleben, von Fritsch, and others) were dead, in retirement, or in relatively powerless positions; and (at least on the surface) the General Staff was now firmly under Hitler's thumb. Hitler was, in short, in a position to act against the Jews in any way he saw fit.

''Nature is cruel,'' the dictator declared,

> [S]o we must also be cruel. If I send the flower of the German people into the inferno of war without the slightest compassion ... for the precious blood that is shed, we certainly have the right to eliminate millions of human being belonging to inferior races that multiply like vermin.[3]

Himmler would have agreed with this assessment; as far as he was concerned, Hitler had the right to do anything he pleased, no matter how outrageous it was, although, as late as May 25, 1940, he personally preferred forced expulsion to the East to extermination. ''Each individual case may seem cruel and tragic,'' he said, ''but this method [expulsion] is the mildest and best if we are to reject as ungermanic, impossible and incompatible with our convictions the Bolshevik method of physically exterminating a race.'' Himmler went on to state that the Eastern peoples would be taught how to sign their names and count to 500, but not how to read. They would then be used as a labor pool for the Reich. He added that Hitler ''warmly approves'' of these ideas.[4] After the fall of France, however, Hitler decided that Madagascar would make a suitable location for the exiled European Jews.

Certainly, Reinhard Heydrich did not have any reservations about committing mass murder or any compassion toward his victims. ''I care nothing about what happens to Russians or Czechs,'' he said. ''Whether other peoples live in prosperity or die of starvation interests me only insofar as we need them as slaves.... If 10,000 Russian women die of exhaustion while digging an anti-tank ditch, it interests me only insofar as the anti-tank ditch is completed for Germany.''[5]

Himmler was taken aback by the order to initiate the Holocaust. ''When the Fuehrer gave the order to carry out the total solution of the Jewish question, I at first hesitated, uncertain whether I could demand of my worthy SS-men the execution of such a horrid assignment,'' he told an assembly of high-ranking military officers on January 26, 1944. ''But this was ultimately a matter of a Fuehrer order, and, therefore I could have no misgivings.''[6] Whatever he thought about the idea

personally, an order was an order to Heinrich Himmler, and should be carried out without question. He never voiced the slightest opposition to the Holocaust.

After Hitler gave the order, he did his best to carry it out. In fact, the only person known to have confronted Hitler in opposition to the extermination process was Henrietta von Schirach, the daughter of Heinrich Hoffmann, who had known Hitler for years. She had witnessed Jews being rounded up in Amsterdam and told him what she had seen and that she was horrified by it.

''You're sentimental,'' he snapped. Henrietta, did not back down, however, and ''there was a terrible row.'' She recalled that Hitler said, ''Every day 10,000 of my best soldiers die on the battlefield, while the others carry on living in the camps. That means the biological balance in Europe isn't right anymore.''[7]

We do not know the exact date on which Hitler ordered the Holocaust to begin, because he avoided signing his own name on any orders directly concerning the extermination progress. This has led one historian to suggest that Hitler may not have known about the systematic mass murders of the Jews until as late as 1943.[8] If this were true, it would fundamentally change the way we look at Nazi Germany. But it is not true. The evidence is abundant enough to prove beyond a doubt that Hitler not only knew about the Holocaust, but also ordered it.[9] ''Responsibility in this kind of hierarchy is always with the Fuehrer,'' Axel von der Bussche said later. ''There is absolutely no doubt that Number One had to know and had given verbal orders ... Anybody who thinks differently just doesn't know how this type of organization works.''[10]

In trying to avoid having his name directly linked to the Holocaust, Hitler was not doing anything he had not done before. At the beginning of the euthanasia program, he had told Philip Bouhler, ''The Fuehrer's Chancellery must under no circumstances be seen to be active in this matter.''[11] Hitler's order to exterminate the Jews was initially given to his deputy, Hermann Goering, in the spring of 1941. He, in turn, passed the order on to Heydrich and ordered him to prepare the ''total solution of the Jewish problem in all the territories under German control.''[12] The Reichsmarschall, in fact, was a middle man whose role in this disgusting process was mainly a formal one. Heydrich's real superior was Himmler.

The first veiled reference to the mobile killing operations is found in the Operation Barbarossa directive of March 13, 1941 (signed by Keitel), which stated that, by the order of the Fuehrer, Reichsfuehrer-SS would carry out special duties in Russia. Because they were to operate in the same zones as the army, the SS entered into negotiations with Brauchitsch's representative, Major General Eduard Wagner, the

Quartermaster General of the Army. Heydrich, the chief of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA), designated Heinrich Mueller, the head of the Gestapo, to negotiate on behalf of the SS. Mueller and Wagner could come to no agreement, however, so, at Wagner's request, Heydrich replaced Mueller with SS Major General Walter Schellenberg, then the chief of the counterintelligence branch of the Gestapo. Under the final arrangement, which was signed in late May, Heydrich's Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing squads) were allowed to operate right up to the frontline, instead of merely in the rear areas, as had been the case in Poland. For his operations in Russia, Heydrich set up four battalion-size Einsatzgruppen, which were divided into company-size Einsatzkommandos and Sonderkornmandos. The Einsatzgruppen were assigned north to south (that is, Einsatzgruppe A was assigned to the zone of Army Group North, B to the zone of Army Group Center, C to the area of Army Group South, and Einsatzgruppe D to the 11th Army's zone).

The officers of the Einsatzgruppen were mainly professional men and varied from a physician to a professional opera singer. Few sought employment in the murder squads. Otto Ohlendorf, the commander of Einsatzgruppe D, was an intellectual who had attended the Universities of Leipzig, Goettingen, and Pavia, and held a doctorate. A lawyer and an economist by training, he joined the party in 1925, the SS the following year, and the SD in 1936. He worked in the Institute for World Economy and Maritime Transport in Kiel before the war and did not look upon his SS activities as his primary career, even after he became chief of SD-Inland (Amt III), one of the main offices of the RSHA (Amt IV was the Gestapo). Perhaps that is why Himmler forced him to accept command of the Einsatzgruppe: he did not like his SS officers to have divided loyalties.[13]

Einsatzgruppe C was led by Otto Rasch, the former security police inspector for Koenigsberg. This older man later claimed to have protested his assignment as soon as he learned its true nature, but he was nevertheless involved in the great massacre of Jews at Kiev in September 1941. He became involved in a dispute with Erich Koch shortly thereafter and went on leave to Germany. He prolonged his furlough (and, in effect, was absent without leave) until he could arrange a transfer. Later he became mayor of Wuerttemburg and director of Continental Oil AG. Near the end of the war, he was offered the post as Higher SS and Police Leader for France and North Italy, but declined it.

Franz Stahlecker led Einsatzgruppe A in the Baltic states. The former head of Amt VIa, the foreign intelligence department of the RSHA, he apparently lost his job through the intrigues of Martin Luther, Ribbentrop's state secretary. He viewed his posting to the Einsatzgruppe as a demotion and was determined to excel, so that he could resume his

advancement in the SS. He never made it. Although Einsatzgruppe A was considered the most efficient of the murder groups, Stahlecker was killed by partisans on March 23, 1942.

Einsatzgruppe B was led by Artur Nebe, a former police detective who had been with the Gestapo since 1933. In September 1939, he became chief of the criminal police or Kripo, Amt V of the RSHA. Nebe was a contradiction. He was one of the few SS members of the anti-Hitler conspiracy, but, as far as I know, Nebe was also the only person who ever volunteered to command an Einsatzgruppe. Earmarked to handle the Moscow area, Nebe's Einsatzgruppe committed thousands of murders in White Russia. Nebe himself returned to the criminal police in November and was succeeded by Erich Naumann.

The total strength of the Einsatzgruppen was about 3,000 men, most of whom were drawn from the Security Police and SD. Others included Waffen-SS men, Order Police, and auxiliaries (that is, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, Ukrainians, and others).

When the Wehrmacht crossed the Soviet frontier on June 22, 1941, there were roughly 5 million Jews living in the Soviet Union; however, they were concentrated in the cities of European Russia. According to Hilberg, 4 million Jews lived in the areas eventually overrun by the German Army. Of these, 1.5 million managed to flee before the Germans arrived.[14] The strategy of the Einsatzgruppen was to follow as closely on the heels of the army as possible, in order to trap as many Jews as possible before they had a chance to learn what was in store for them and flee.

Those who were captured were driven to burial pits, where the actual shooting was done by German police troops, who were armed with Schmeisser or Sten machine guns. At his trial, Otto Ohlendorf described a typical ''operation'' of his Einsatzgruppe:

> The unit would enter an occupied village or city and order the leaders of the Jewish community to call all Jews together at a specified place. They were told that they were about to be ''resettled.'' This kept down panic and made our task easier.
>
> The Jews were then requested to hand over their valuables to our squad leaders. Just before the executions, the victims were ordered to remove their clothes.
>
> The men, women and children were then led to the place of execution which was usually a tank ditch dug extra deep for the occasion, or a large natural ditch of some kind.
>
> Then they were shot, kneeling or standing, and the corpses thrown in the ditch.[15]

In the initial phases of the extermination process, the murderers seldom achieved security, and some commandos do not seem to have

even tried. Hermann Graebe, a German civilian construction engineer, was in Rovno, in the Ukraine, on the night of July 13–14, 1941, when the Einsatzgruppe struck. He later testified:

Shortly after 2200 hours [10 P.M.], the ghetto, the Jewish section, was surrounded by a large detachment of SS troops and about three times as many Ukranian militiamen [collaborators]. Huge electric arc lights that had been erected in and around the ghetto were switched on, and detachments of 4 to 6 SS men and militia troops began forcing their way into the houses, smashing doors and breaking windows and shouting for the people inside to get out of bed and come outside.

The people were driven into the streets just as they were, some half dressed, some undressed. When they resisted, they were beaten with whips and rifle butts. At last the houses were empty. Some of the parents were driven from the homes before they could gather up their children, and in the streets the mothers were wailing and crying for their young ones. That didn't stop the troops from driving the people through the streets like cattle toward waiting freight cars.

Amid the screams of the women and the crack of the whips and the sound of rifle fire, the people were jammed into the freight cars.

Some of the younger and stronger broke away and ran for freedom into the dark beyond the arc lights. To catch them or shoot them down, the Germans sent up rocket flares.

All night long, these beaten, hounded and wounded people streamed through the brightly lighted streets toward the waiting train. Women carried dead babies in their arms. Children pulled the dead bodies of their parents along, sometimes dragging them by an arm or leg.

I saw dozens of corpses of all ages and both sexes in the streets as I walked along. The doors of the houses were open, the windows smashed. Scattered about in the streets were shoes, stockings, jackets, caps, hats, coats, and so on. At the corner of one house lay a little child of less than one year old with a smashed skull. Blood and brains were smeared on the wall of the house and on the street. The child was wearing only a little shirt.[16]

Graeber later witnessed another ''action,'' which occurred near the Dubno Airport, in the former Volhynian province of Poland, in full view of German soldiers and anyone else who happened to be in the area. He later testified:

An old woman with snow-white hair was holding this one-year-old child in her arms and singing and tickling it. The child was cooing with delight. The parents were looking on with tears in their eyes. The father was holding the hand of a boy about 10 years old and speaking to him softly; the boy was fighting his tears. The father pointed towards the sky, stroked the boy's head, and seemed to explain something to him. At that moment the SS man at the pit shouted something to his comrade. The latter counted off about 20 persons and instructed them to go behind the earth mound. The family I have

described was among them. I well remember the girl, slim and with black hair, who, as she passed me, pointed to herself and said: ''Twenty-three years old.''

I then walked round the mound and found myself confronted by a tremendous grave. People were closely wedged together and lying on top of each other so that only their heads were visible. Nearly all had blood running over their shoulders and their heads. Some of the people shot were still moving. Some lifted their arms and turned their heads to show that they were still alive. The pit was already two-thirds full. I estimate that it held a thousand people. I looked for the man who did the shooting. He was an SS man who sat at the edge of the narrow end of the pit, his feet dangling into it. He had a tommy gun on his knees and was smoking a cigarette. The people—they were completely naked—went down some steps which were cut in the clay wall of the pit and clambered over the heads of those who were lying there to the place to which the SS man directed them. They lay down in front of the dead and wounded. Some caressed the living and spoke to them in a low voice. Then I heard a series of shots. I looked into the pit and saw that their bodies still twitched or that their heads lay motionless on top of the other bodies before them. Blood ran from their necks. I was surprised that I was not ordered off, but I saw that there were two or three postmen in uniform near by. Already the next batch was approaching. They went down into the pit, lined themselves up against the previous victims and were shot. When I walked back round the mound, I noticed that another truckload of people had arrived. This time it included sick and feeble people. An old, terribly thin woman was undressed by the others, who were already naked, while two people held her up. The woman appeared to be paralysed. The naked people carried her round the mound. I left . . .

On the morning of the next day, when I visited the site, I saw about 30 naked people lying near the pit—about 30 to 50 meters away from it. Some of them were still alive; they looked straight in front of them with a fixed stare and seemed to notice neither the chilliness of the morning nor the workers of my firm who stood around. A girl of about 20 spoke to me and asked me to give her clothes and help her escape. At that moment we heard a fast car approaching and I noticed that it was an SS detail. I moved away to my site. Ten minutes later we heard shots from the vicinity of the pit. Those Jews who were still alive had been ordered to throw the corpses into the pit, then they themselves had to lie down in the pit to be shot in the neck.[17]

One is compelled to ask: ''How could anyone except a complete pervert commit such abominable and unspeakable crimes? How could one function as a member of an Einsatzgruppe and retain one's sanity?'' In answer to the first question, I have no idea. In answer to the second question, many did not. Hardened SS men cracked under the strain of slaughtering thousands of innocent men, women, and children. They heard their screams for mercy in their dreams and woke up screaming themselves. Quite a few could stand it no longer and deserted. Others committed suicide. Hundreds of them became hopeless alcoholics and were unable to perform their duties unless they were blind drunk.

Discipline and morale deteriorated, and it even effected the senior officers. SS Colonel Karl Jaeger, the commander of Einsatzkommando 3, had a nervous breakdown and had to be sent home. General Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, the Higher SS and Police Leader Center (who was abnormal anyway), was plagued with hallucinations in which he relived the murders in which he had participated and had to be hospitalized. Major General of Police Heinz Jost, who replaced the dead Stahlecker in March 1942, held his post only three months before he, in effect, deserted to the Eastern Ministry and became Rosenberg's liaison officer to Field Marshal von Kleist. Himmler arranged for him to be demoted to second lieutenant and sent to the front. Worse still from the standpoint of Himmler and his cronies, many of the executioners talked freely when they were drunk, which was most of the time, and were careless about their ''actions.'' Word began to spread from ordinary soldiers to their friends and families about what was going on in the East—about what the Third Reich was really like. Soon there were not enough volunteers to replace the lost executioners, even though the members of the Einsatzgruppen did not have to fight at the front, received home leave every three months, were paid triple the ordinary pay for their rank, and were given a generous alcohol ration. Himmler and Heydrich soon had to resort to SS men who were discipline problems and soldiers in trouble. SS Major General Georg Keppler, the commander of the ''Das Reich'' Division, explained this process to Dr. Felix Kersten, Himmler's masseur:

> They are late or they fall asleep on sentry duty. They are court-martial led but are told that they can escape punishment by volunteering for special commandos. For fear of punishment and in the belief that their career is ruined anyway, these young men ask to be transferred to the special commandos. Well, these commandos, where they are first put through a special training, are murder commandos. When the young men realize what they were being asked to do and refuse to take part in mass murder, they are told that the orders that have been given them are a form of punishment. Either they can obey and take that punishment or they can disobey and be shot. In any case their career is over and done with. By such methods, decent young men are frequently turned into criminals.[18]

General Keppler knew of what he spoke. His own ''Das Reich'' Division had been ordered to supply a commando to conduct an ''action'' and was responsible for the September 9, 1941, massacre at Lachoisk (near Minsk), in which 920 Jews were liquidated.[19]

Meanwhile, a second set of officials responsible for mass murders of Jews and other undesirables arrived in the occupied territories: the Higher SS and Police Leaders. The Higher SS and Police Leader North (HSSPf) was Obergruppenfuehrer (full general of police) Hans Adolf

Pruetzmanni, General of Police Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski was HSSPf Center, and Franz Jeckeln was HSSPf South. Each HSSPf arrived with a regiment of police, which assisted the Einsatzgruppen and, in several cases, conducted the massacres themselves. Jaeckeln was particularly aggressive in this regard and was soon ordered to exchange commands with Preutzmann, who was less active, although he did put about 10,000 Jews to death in the Riga area. Jaeckeln's Order Police Regiment South, however, liquidated about 20,000 Jews in the Kiev area in a two-day period. At the request of Field Marshal von Reichenau, he helped clear out a nest of partisans in 6th Army's rear, killing 240 guerrillas and Communists and 1,658 Jews in the process. Then he shot 23,600 Jews at Kamenets Podolski, 1,303 Jews at Berdichev (mostly women), 10,000 at Dnepropetrovsk, and 15,000 at Rostov. Bach, meanwhile, assisted Einsatzgruppen B in murdering 2,278 Jews in Minsk and 3,726 in Mogilev.[20]

The Einsatzgruppen and HSSPfs did not act alone: they were supported, and often assisted, by local populations, extreme nationalists, and frequently by the Wehrmacht. In the Lithuanian capital of Kovno, 1,500 Jews were killed on the night of June 25 and 2,300 the following day. In his after-action report, Franz Stahlecker, the commander of Einsatzgruppe A, praised the anti-Communist Lithuanian partisans and ''the understanding attitude of the Wehrmacht.'' Unfortunately for him, Field Marshal Ritter Wilhelm von Leeb, the straight-laced commander-in-chief of Army Group North and a man of considerable character, did not understand at all. He ordered the more cooperative General von Kuechler, the commander of 18th Army, to prevent such incidents from recurring. Henceforth, Stahlecker received no further help from the army, but plenty from the Lithuanians. In mid-July, they assisted a Sonderkommando in removing 700 Jewish hostages from the city of Vilna to a railroad stop variously known as Ponary, Punar, or Panarai, where the Russians had dug huge pits for petroleum storage tanks. Here they were shot by the Germans and Lithuanians. According to Reitlinger, these pits were to become the first of the permanent extermination camps. In early 1942, Stahlecker reported that, in his firing squads, Lithuanians outnumbered Germans by a ratio of 8 to 1.[21] By mid-1942, entire battalions of Lithuanian police were assisting the SS in every way possible, including committing mass murders and guarding concentration camps and ghettoes. Meanwhile, Stahlecker was compiling what Berlin considered a record of success. By mid-September, he had cleared the main town of Vilna of Jews, killing 25,000 to 30,000 in the process. The Jews of this city were now isolated in a ghetto. On October 28, the Einsatzgruppe raided Kovno, carrying off 10,000 people in a single day. They were taken to the death pits of Fort Number 9 and shot. On November 7, a similar number of Jews

were taken from Dunaburg (Dwinsk) to Zolotaya Gorka and shot. The Jewish ghettoes in Riga were raided on November 30 and more than 10,000 more Jews were liquidated. Two more ''actions'' followed, and, by the beginning of 1942, 27,800 Riga Jews had been murdered and fewer than 5,000 remained alive. The Riga ghetto, meanwhile, had received its first shipment of ''Reich Jews'' (that is, Jews from Germany), and other Jewish ghettoes had been established in Libau and Dwinsk.

In many places, the Einsatzgruppen was also assisted by the Wehrmacht; in fact, several of the Einsatzkommandos reported that the armed forces were surprisingly eager to assist them. Ritter von Leeb refused to honor the RSHA-OKH agreement and forbade his troops to cooperate with the murder squads in any way, but men of his high morale and religious character are, unfortunately, rare. Some of the names of men who cooperated are surprising. Dr. Stahlecker, the commander of Einsatzgruppe A, for example, praised Colonel General Hoepner and reported that his relations with 4th Panzer Army were ''very close, yes, almost cordial.'' General of Infantry Carl-Heinrich von Stueplnagel, the commander of 17th Army, actually requested that Einsatzkommando 4a wipe out the Jews in Kremenchug, because of partisan attacks on his communications.[22] Hoepner called Operation Barbarossa the continuation of an age-old struggle between the Germanic and Slavic peoples and represented the ''defense of European culture against Moscovite-Asiatic inundation, and the repulse of Jewish Bolshevism.'' He added that the destruction of Russia ''must be conducted with unprecedented severity.''[23] Both Hoepner and von Stueplnagel later played prominent roles in the July 20, 1944, anti-Hitler coup, and both were hanged after it failed. As commander of the 17th Army, Colonel General Hermann Hoth called on his men to understand the ''necessity of harsh punishment of Jewry.''[24] General of Infantry Karl von Roques, the rear area commander, Army Group South, assisted in reprisals against Jews, and 11th Army (Erich von Manstein) provided the Einsatzkommandos in its area of operation with gasoline, trucks, and sometimes even soldiers.[25] Meanwhile, Field Marshal von Reichenau issued an order, ''Conduct of Troops in the Eastern Territories,'' which so impressed Hitler that he held it up as a model for others to follow. It read in part, ''We have to exact a harsh but just retribution on the Jewish subhumans. This serves the added purpose of stifling at birth uprisings in the rear of the Wehrmacht, since experience shows that these are always conceived by Jews.''[26]

Field Marshal von Rundstedt had the Reichenau order duplicates and copies were sent to 11th, 17th, and 1st Panzer Armies. Kuechler, the commander of the 18th Army, issued an order that was largely a copy of Reichenau's. Manstein wrote an elaboration of the order,

informing his men that the Jews were the liaison man between the Red Army and the partisans. General of Infantry Hans von Salmuth, the commander of the XXX Corps, asked Ohlendorf to exterminate the Jews of Kodyma (in Transdniestria) and sent 300 men to help him. He also issued directives to his subordinates, ordering them to cooperate with the SD (that is, the Einsatzgruppen).

With such orders and examples from many of the senior generals, there can be little wonder that some of the junior commanders also cooperated with the Einsatzgruppen, and sometimes even went into the mass murder business themselves. In the summer of 1941, for example, after mopping up in the Mirgorod vicinity (in the zone of Army Group South), Lieutenant General Rudolf Friedrich's 62nd Infantry Division shot the entire Jewish population (168 people), in addition to 45 partisans. In October and November 1941, Major General Baron Gustav von Mauchenheim gennant von Bechtoldsheim's 707th Infantry Division, operating in the rear area of White Russia, shot 10,431 out of a total of 10,940 ''captives.'' During the same period, the division suffered only seven casualties (two killed and five wounded).[27] Under Reichenau, 6th Army was especially active in slaughtering civilians, especially Jews.

Despite the fact that their zone of operation was small, the Romanians also played a prominent role in the mass murders, although their killings resembled atrocities that got out of hand. On October 16, 1941, the 4th Romanian Army finally took Odessa after a long struggle. Before the war began, this city had a Jewish population of about 175,000—ranking it with Berlin, Lodz, Vienna, and Kiev; but more than 100,000 of them were able to flee to the east before the city fell. Six days later, a delayed action bomb exploded and destroyed the former NKVD building, which now served as the headquarters of the 10th Romanian Infantry Division. Two hundred twenty people were killed, including the port captain and several other Germans. Marshal Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, ordered 100 Jews to be killed for every soldier who died in the explosion, as well as 200 Jews for every officer. During the night of October 22–23, 19,000 Jews were driven into the harbor area and shot. Their bodies were doused with gasoline and burned. Meanwhile, another 40,000 Jews were transported to a collective farm at Dalnic and shot in anti-tank ditches. Nearly 60,000 Jews are killed in these two operations—more than twice the number called for by Antonescu's decree.

Elsewhere, the mass murders were less successful. In Belorussia (White Russia), for example, Nebe and his successor, Erich Naumann, had to cover an area half the size of Western Europe. It featured forests, swamps, and marshes, and was characterized by a lack of all-weather roads. Geography enabled many of the Jews to escape. By the

end of February 1942, Einsatzgruppe B had only killed 33,000 Jews in eight months; there had been approximately 850,000 Jews in the region when Operation Barbarossa began. More than half of the murdered Jews had come from Minsk.

In White Russia, the Jews acquired a totally unexpected protector: Wilhelm Kube, the *Generalkommissar*. Upon inspecting the ghetto in Minsk, the lecherous Kube was moved to find that many of the Jewish girls and women looked like Aryans. In February 1942, however, Minsk was transferred from the zone of Einsatzgruppe B to Einsatzgruppe A, which was commanded by Stahlecker, who was more successful than Nebe or Naumann (from Heydrich's point of view). Stahlecker made Einsatzkommando 2 responsible for Minsk, and Kube was forced to take on one of the most brutal of Heydrich's murderers, SS Major Dr. Eduard Strauch. Strauch soon reported Kube for his efforts, leading to a visit by Heydrich, who gave the Generalkommissar a severe dressing down. He demanded that Strauch and Kube completely liquidate the Jewish populations in the Minsk area at once. Heydrich's visit definitely had its effect: there were very few Jews left in White Russia by the end of 1942.

In 1941, some 2 million Soviet Jews lived in the Ukraine, which included the former Polish territory of Eastern Galicia, which had been annexed by Stalin in 1939. These areas were the responsibility of Einsatzgruppen C and D (commanded by Otto Rasch and Otto Ohlendorf, respectively). Although most of the Jews escaped to the east as the Red Army retreated, the SS carried out mass murders in Lvov, Zhitomar, Uman, Kherson, Kharkov, Dniepropetrovsk, and others. The most famous of the executions, however, was carried out by Commando 4a, which was led by Paul Blobel, a former Duesseldorf architect turned drunkard and mass murderer.

Blobel's commando was attached to 6th Army, which was led by Field Marshal von Reichenau, a notorious Nazi. Reichenau took Kiev on September 19. Five days later, a tremendous explosion wrecked the Continental Hotel, the headquarters of 6th Army's Rear Area Command. Before the fires could be contained, dozens of German soldiers had been killed, Blobel had been forced to abandon his headquarters and 25,000 people had been made homeless. Before the fires could be extinguished, Blobel, Otto Rasch, and army Major General Kurt Eberhard, the commandant of Kiev, had decided to retaliate against the Jews. On September 26, notices were posted ordering the Jews to report for ''resettlement.'' The Germans expected 5,000 to 6,000 to actually show up; but more than 30,000 reported. In two days, September 29 and 30, Blobel's commando exterminated 33,771 Jews in the Babi Yar ravine—a two-day record that was never equaled—not even by the death factories of Auschwitz and Treblinka.[28]

With the failure of Army Group Center to capture Moscow, the ''first sweep'' was over. Of the 4 million Jews in the area of operations, about 1.5 million had escaped with the Soviets, 500,000 had been killed, and at least 2 million remained alive. Himmler was not particularly pleased with the result of the Einsatzgruppen operations. They were too public, they were unsystematic, and they were too hard on his SS men. Himmler had a little experience in this area himself. In July 1941, he asked Nebe to shoot 100 prisoners, so he could see what the executions were like. Nebe did so, but Himmler could not watch: he looked at the ground before every volley. The murders made him physically ill.

After the shooting stopped, von dem Bach-Zelewski, the HSSPf Center, approached him. ''Reichsfuehrer, those were only a hundred,'' he said.

''What do you mean by that?'' Himmler asked.

''Look at the eyes of the men in this Kommando, how deeply shaken they are! These men are finished for the rest of their lives. What kind of followers are we training here? Either neurotics or savages!''

Himmler was clearly moved by Bach's words. He assembled the commando and gave a speech, in which he pointed out that it was their lot to carry out a repulsive duty, but that their consciences should in no way be impaired, since they were soldiers who had to carry out every order unconditionally.

After the speech, Himmler and Bach inspected an insane asylum. Himmler ordered SS General Karl Wolff, the chief of his personal staff, to end the suffering of these people as quickly as possible, but to use some method other than shooting. Nebe asked permission to try dynamite. Himmler consented, but the results were woeful.[29] Efforts continued, however, to find more efficient means and methods for committing mass murder, while a second sweep of the Jews in the occupied territories began.

NOTES

1. Ernst Nolte, ''Between Myth and Revisionism? The Third Reich in the Perspective of the 1980's,'' in Koch, *Aspects*, p. 35.
2. Flood, *Hitler*, p. 244.
3. Calic, *Heydrich*, p. 11.
4. Irving 1977, p. 123.
5. Calic, *Heydrich*, p. 11.
6. Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (1986), p. xxxii (hereafter cited as Fleming). Even after the extermination of the Jews began, there were two schools of thought within the SS regarding the Jews. Oswald Pohl's SS Main Economic Office (Wirtschaftshauptamt), which wanted to gradually take over the entire German economy, felt (correctly) that the wholesale destruction

of the Jews was counterproductive to the German war effort. These men believed the Jews should be treated in such a manner as to retain their productive capacity. The second school of thought were the views of Hitler and the SS racial fanatics, represented by Reich Security Office (*Reichssicherheltshauptamt*), who advocated extermination. Even after Himmler issued orders to halt the mass murders of the Jews in September 1944, they continued to gas Hungarian Jews.

7. ''The Fatal Attraction of Adolf Hitler,'' *Biography*. Peter Graves, narrator. A BBC Production in Association with the A & E Network, 1989 (hereafter cited as ''Fatal Attraction'').
8. Irving *Hitler's War*.
9. See Fleming.
10. ''Fatal Attraction.''
11. Fleming, p. 20.
12. Saul Friedlaender, ''Introduction,'' in Fleming, *Final Solution*, p. xiii.
13. Ohlendorf commanded Einsatzgruppe D until June 1942. He became a ministerial director and deputy to the state secretary of the ministry of economics in 1943.
14. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961), p. 190.
15. Richard Hanser, *True Tales of Hitler's Reich* (1962), p. 176; Ohlendorf was tried at Nuremberg and hanged on June 7, 1951. His Einsatzgruppe D killed more than 90,000 Jews. It killed 14,300 people (mostly Jews) at Simferopol (Crimea) in a single day.
16. Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, November 14, 1945, to October 1, 1946, vol. 19(1948), p. 457 (hereafter cited as IMT).
17. Ibid.
18. Felix Kersten, *The Memoirs of Doctor Felix Kersten* (1947), p. 153.
19. Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution* (1961), p. 211. Georg Keppler was born in Mainz in 1894. He served in the infantry in World War I, where he was wounded three times, won both grades of the Iron Cross, and earned a commission. An early Nazi, he was a police officer until 1934, when he briefly rejoined the army. He transferred to the SS-VT in 1935. He rose rapidly and, during World War II, commanded the SS Regiment ''Der Fuehrer,'' served as acting commander of the Totenkopf Division in 1941 (when Eicke was in the hospital with wounds), and commanded the SS Division ''Nord,'' the 2nd SS Panzer Grenadier Division ''Das Reich,'' the I SS Panzer Corps, the III (germ.) SS Panzer Corps, and the XVIII SS Corps. He was a prisoner of war until 1948, but was never prosecuted for war crimes. He settled in Hamburg, where he died in 1966.
20. Hilberg, pp. 193–96.
21. Reitlinger, pp. 213–14.
22. Hilberg, pp. 199–200.
23. Foerster, ''Weltanschauungen,'' p. 309.
24. Ibid., p. 315.

25. Hilberg, pp. 199–200.
26. Irving 1977, p. 385.
27. Foerster, ''Weltanschauungen,'' p. 315.
28. Reitlinger, pp. 233–34.

Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel (*left*), the commander-in-chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces (1938–45), shaking hands with his chief, Adolf Hitler. In Keitel, Hitler found the yes-man he was looking for to conduit his orders and policies to the armed forces without questioning them. Even though Hitler said Keitel had the ''brains of a cinema usher,'' he held his post throughout the war. Promoted to field marshal on July 19, 1940, Keitel was executed as Nuremberg on October 16, 1946 (U.S. National Archives).

Hitler's personal bodyguard, the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, November 9, 1935. From 133 men, this unit grew to a strength of more than 20,000 men by 1943, when it became the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler. Throughout this period, it was commanded by Joseph ''Sepp'' Dietrich (Courtesy of Dr. Waldo Dalstead).

A German reconnaissance unit advances in Norway, 1940. Contrary to popular myth, most German Army units in World War II were not motorized (U.S. National Archives).

Field Marshal Erich von Manstein (1887–1973), considered by the German Officer Corps to be its most brilliant general. A strategic genius, it was Manstein who devised the plan that led to the fall of France. During World War II, Manstein served as chief of staff of Army Groups South and A and commanded the XXXVIII Corps, LVI Panzer Corps, 11th Army, and Army Group Don and South. He conquered Sevastopol in 1942 and saved the southern sector of the Eastern Front during the winter of 1942–43. Hitler sacked him on March 31, 1944. He was never reemployed. He was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment in 1950 but was released for medical reasons in 1953 (U.S. National Archives).

Hermann Hoth was born in Neuruppen, northern Brandenburg, in 1885 and was educated in cadet schools. He entered the army as a Faehnrich in 1904 and was commissioned in 1905. Although an infantryman by trade, he proved to be an excellent commander of motorized and armored forces. During World War II, he commanded the XV Motorized Corps (1938–40), 3rd Panzer Group (later Army, 1940–41), 17th Army (1941–42), and 4th Panzer Army (1942–43). He was promoted to general of infantry in 1938 and to colonel general on July 19, 1940. Hitler did not appreciate his opinions on the deteriorating situation on the Eastern Front and forced him into retirement on November 30, 1943. He was never reemployed. He was captured by the Americans, tried as a war criminal, and was sentenced to 15 years in Landsberg prison in late 1948. He was released in April 1954 and retired to Goslar am Harz, where he died on January 25, 1971 (U.S. National Archives).

A German infantryman stops for a snack in the Crimea, 1941 (U.S. National Archives).

Junkers Ju-52 transport airplanes landing on an emergency field near Demyansk, Russia, 1942. The transports were able to resupply and save the encircled II Corps. They were unable to save 6th Army a year later (U.S. National Archives).

General of SS Theodor Eiche, commander of the Dachua Concentration Camp, Inspector General of Concentration Camps, and commander of the Totenkopf (Death's Head) SS Division (later the 3rd SS Panzer Division) in Belgium, France, and Russia. A ruthless murderer, Eiche personally shot Ernst Roehm, commander of the Brownshirts, in his jail cell in 1934, and mocked him as he lay dying. A poor commander in France, Eiche's performance improved in Russia and he distinguished himself at Demyansk. He was killed in action on the Eastern Front in February 1943 (U.S. National Archives).

The desert in flames, December 1941. Under the Desert Fox, Panzer Army Afrika and the Afrika Korps distinguished themselves against numerically superior forces from throughout the British Empire (U.S. National Archives).

British and South African soldiers march off to the prisoner-of-war camps, 1942. These soldiers were captured near Ain el Gazala, when the Gazala Line was abandoned (U.S. Military History Institute).

An infantry company on the Russian Front, 1943. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the average authorized strength of a German infantry company was 180 men. After the Battle of Moscow, the size of the average company was reduced to about 80 men. Due to experience and the introduction of more automatic weapons, the combat effectiveness of the typical German infantry company did not diminish drastically as a result of these changes (U.S. National Archives).

A German 20mm anti-aircraft gun, mounted on a panzer chassis, prepares for action on the southern sector of the Eastern Front, 1942 (U.S. Military History Institute).

Friedrich Paulus (1890–1957), the commander of the 6th Army at Stalingrad. A capable General Staff officer, Paulus proved too conservative and indecisive to lead an army effectively. He was captured by the Russians on January 31, 1942, only hours after Hitler promoted him to field marshal. (Since no German field marshal had been captured before, this promotion was an invitation to commit suicide.) This he would not do. He was a Soviet POW until 1954 (Courtesy of John Angolia).

Colonel General Kurt Zeitzler (1895–1963), the chief of the General Staff of the Army, 1942 to 1944. A highly energetic officer (he was nicknamed Fireball), he was chief of staff of OB West and a relatively junior major general when Hitler named him chief of the General Staff and promoted him to general of infantry. He bypassed the rank of lieutenant general altogether. Hitler hoped Zeitzler would be a yes-man like Keitel, but he was not. He firmly advocated allowing 6th Army to break out of the Stalingrad encirclement. He also apparently knew of the Stauffenberg assassination plot in 1944 and made sure that he was not in the room when Stauffenberg's bomb detonated. Zeitzler's deputy, General Heusinger—who was in the room and was severely injured—never forgave Zeitzler for this act. Zeitzler ended the war in a concentration camp (U.S. National Archives).

Soviet infantry in the attack, Stalingrad, 1942 (U.S. Military History Institute).

CHAPTER XXXIV
THE DESERT WAR

When Hitler's legions crossed into the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps and its accompanying Italian units were besieging Tobruk. Although the battles in North Africa were to occupy much of the attention of the people of the Western Powers, they were considered to be strictly of secondary importance by the German people, whose attention was riveted on the Eastern Front. Indeed, to Rommel's constant frustration, the North African theater never amounted to more than 3 percent of the Nazi war effort until after the desert war was irrevocably lost. By the end of June, for example, OKH had committed 160 divisions to the Eastern Front. Rommel had only two German divisions in North Africa.

SLATEMATE

When Rommel's last assault on Tobruk failed on May 1, his forces were experiencing severe supply difficulties and could not continue their drive toward Egypt and the Suez Canal. In the meantime, however, his reconnaissance forces had penetrated as far as the Egyptian frontier, giving him an early warning system, in case the British tried to break the siege.

In the meantime, Sir Archibald Wavell, the British commander-in-chief, Middle East, reestablished the Western Desert Force, under the command of Lieutenant General Sir Noel Beresford-Peirse. The units at his disposal included the 4th Indian Division, what was left of the 7th Australian Division, the British 6th Infantry Division, and Brigadier William H. E. Gott's Mobile Force (22nd Guards Brigade, 11th Hussars Regiment, and the 2nd Support Group). Beresford-Peirse was reinforced with 238 tanks, of which 35 were Matilda IIs, the latest-model heavy infantry support (or ''I'') tanks, which weighed 26.5 tons. Most of the rest were Mark II cruiser tanks (14 tons). Both were a match for most of Rommel's panzers.

From Ultra and other intercepts, the British learned that Rommel's supply situation had deteriorated drastically. In May, for example, the Afrika Korps needed 50,000 tons of supplies, but received only 29,000.[1] Soon the German soldiers were short of almost everything. Food, for instance, was universally bad. The troops besieging Tobruk, for example, received only one meal a day. It arrived in the front trenches about midnight and consisted of a poor-quality soup, processed cheese, sardines, and black bread. They had to eat olive oil instead of butter, which spoiled too quickly in the desert. Sometimes they were given Italian rations marked with the brand name ''A.M.'' The Germans called it *armer Mussolini* (poor Mussolini), but the less charitable Italians referred to it as *asino morte*: dead donkey.

Conditions were also bad in the tank units. Temperatures in the desert reached 107° F, and temperatures inside the panzers reached 160° F. Many undersupplied and underfed young men of the Afrika Korps ended up in the hospital with dysentery or heat exhaustion. Their morale nevertheless remained incredibly high. Under Rommel's inspiring leadership, they had already begun to think of themselves as an elite unit, capable of astonishing feats against tremendous odds. They were about to prove the correctness of their attitude to the entire world.

The first British attacks (Operation Brevity) began on May 15. Gott's Mobile Force overran the vital Halfaya Pass (the northern anchor of Rommel's frontier defenses) and the inland frontier fortress/town of Capuzzo. The German screening force continued to retreat the following day, but on May 17 Rommel came up with 160 tanks (the bulk of the Afrika Korps) and counterattacked. He destroyed 18 British tanks and pushed Gott back to the Sidi Omar-Sidi Suleiman line. Rommel attacked again on May 18, using a perfect coordination of artillery, armor, and infantry that characterized the operations of the Afrika Korps. The British, as was often the case in the first years of the war, sent their armor into battle unsupported by the infantry, and vice versa. In ''Brevity,'' the superior tactics of the Afrika Korps resulted in the isolation of the 3rd Coldstream Guards Battalion at Halfaya Pass. It broke out during the night of May 26–27, but lost 173 men, four guns, eight AT guns and five infantry support tanks (''I'' tanks) in the process. Operation Brevity had accomplished nothing. Rommel only lost three tanks during the entire operation.

OPERATION BATTLEAXE

For their summer offensive, the British badly outnumbered Lieutenant General Rommel. They had more than 300 tanks, against 80 for the 15th Panzer Division and perhaps a few less in the 5th Light. In terms

of modern tanks, Rommel had only 95 PzKw IIIs and IVs, the only tanks of real value in his arsenal. The British also had superior artillery forces and the Royal Air Force outnumbered the Luftwaffe 116 to 60 in fighters and 128 to 79 in bombers and dive-bombers. Overall, the odds against Rommel were about 2.5 or 3 to 1. Meanwhile, in June, 40 percent of his supplies were sunk before they could reach Africa. His forces needed 1,500 tons of supplies per day but were receiving less than 1,000.

Operation Battleaxe began on June 15, when Major General F. W. Messervy's 4th Indian Division (with 22nd Armored Brigade in support) made its first effort to storm Halfaya Pass. It was defended by a garrison led by the Reverend Captain William ''Papa'' Bach, a battalion commander from the 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. The British attack was spearheaded by a large detachment of Mark IIs, perhaps their most deadly tank, but it was met by an even more dangerous foe: the 88-millimeter anti-aircraft gun. This weapon could effectively engage an opponent at a range of 11,000 yards—more than six miles—and a good crew could fire 20 rounds a minute with accuracy. The Indian infantry advanced courageously, but was decimated; British tanks were ripped apart long before they could get within range of their enemies. Eleven of the 12 British tanks advancing south of the pass were destroyed, and four others (attacking north of the pass) ran into a minefield and were blown up.

Just inland from the coastal plan, a steep ridge (called the ''Coastal Escarpment'') parallels the Coastal Road. It could only be crossed by armored vehicles at a very few points. Without Halfaya Pass, the 4th Indian and its supporting armor would be unable to join the 7th Armored Division and Gott's Mobile Force to the south. Messervy, therefore, railed against the pass all day on June 15 and 16, but Bach turned him back every time. Five major attacks were repulsed on June 16 alone. Meanwhile, Beresford-Peirse tried to outflank Rommel to the south.

Rommel's desert flank was anchored at Point 208 (Hafid Ridge), which was defended by the 1st Oasis Company, a machine gun section, a battery of 37-millimeter anti-tank guns, and a battery of legendary 88s, all under the command of Lieutenant Paulewicz. Late on the morning of June 16, he was attacked by 70 tanks from the 7th Armored Brigade. Paulewicz held his fire until the Mark IIs were well within range; then he blasted them with a concentrated volley. Within a few minutes, 11 Mark IIs were burning wrecks, and the rest had retreated out of range. The British attacked again that afternoon and lost another 17 tanks. A third attack late that afternoon (this one involving only infantry) was also halted.

By nightfall on June 16, the British had been checked in the north and the south. In the center, however, the 8th Panzer Regiment had been

involved in a free-for-all around Capuzzo with elements of the 4th Armored and 22nd Guards Brigades and the 31st Royal Field Artillery Regiment. It had lost 50 of its 80 tanks. Despite this local Allied victory, however, Rommel still had the advantage, because he still had almost a division in reserve, and the British had practically no reserves left.

That afternoon, Rommel ordered von Ravenstein's 5th Light to move far to the south. As nightfall approached, this division launched Rommel's decisive attack. It caught the 7th Armored Brigade in an exposed position six miles west of Sidi Omar and still shaken from its defeat at Point 208. By nightfall, the 7th Armored had only 21 operational tanks.

With the Allied southern flank wavering, Rommel boldly stripped his center of mobile forces and sent the bulk of the 15th Panzer Division (including what was left of the 8th Panzer Regiment) to reinforce the 5th Light. This was a dangerous maneuver, for a major Allied attack from Capuzzo toward Tobruk would have resulted in a decisive defeat for the Afrika Korps. The British, however, did not attack, but Rommel did. Beginning at dawn on June 17, he drove deep into the rear of the Western Desert Force, which only escaped with difficulty, leaving behind dozens of vehicles, some of which had to be abandoned due to lack of gasoline. The Allies lost 100 tanks that day, as opposed to 25 for the Afrika Korps. Nazi Germany had won its first major defensive battle. As a result, Rommel was promoted to general of panzer troops effective July 1 and was named commander of Panzer Group Afrika. Lieutenant General Ferdinand Schaal was named commander of the Afrika Korps, but he was in poor health and was only able to remain in North Africa a few days. His announced successor was Major General Philip Mueller-Gebhard, a man with no panzer experience. Rommel succeeded in having his appointment cancelled. The fourth commander of the Afrika Korps was Lieutenant General Ludwig Cruewell, who had led the 11th Panzer Division in the Balkans. His appointment turned out to be a fortunate one indeed. General Gause moved up to the post of chief of staff of Panzer Group Afrika, and Colonel Fritz Bayerlein was named chief of staff of the Afrika Korps. The 5th Light was simultaneously upgraded and redesignated 21st Panzer Division (but with no new units). Ravenstein remained its commander, and the popular Major General Walter Neumann-Silkow continued as commander of the 15th Panzer.

At the same time, Rommel received authorization to form a new division from the miscellaneous German units in Libya. Initially dubbed the Afrika Division, it was soon redesignated the 90th Light Division. At first it had only four non-motorized infantry battalions, but was eventually fleshed out to a full three regiments of motorized troops, as well as the 190th Panzer Battalion. Its first commander was Major General Max Suemmermann. Improvised units of this type seldom become

elite formations, but for some unexplainable reason this one did. Because it was immobile, the 90th was initially used in the trench lines, to steady the four Italian divisions involved in the Siege of Tobruk.

THE SUPPLY WAR

Following Rommel's victory in Operation Battleaxe, a long lull descended on the North African Front. Prime Minister Churchill relieved General Wavell of his duties and replaced him with Sir Claude Auchinleck. Shortly thereafter, the Western Desert Force was redesignated XIII Corps and placed under the command of Lieutenant General Sir Alfred R. Godwin-Austen; it was subordinated to the 8th Army, which was activated in Egypt under the leadership of General Sir Alan Cunningham. The 8th Army also included the XXX Corps (under Major General C. Willoughby M. Norrie) and X Corps (Lieutenant General Sir William G. Holmes).

From July to November 1941, both sides engaged in a race to build up enough supplies and forces to assume the offensive. Churchill sent 8th Army lavish amounts of supplies and equipment, including a good quantity of war equipment obtained from the theoretically neutral United States. From July to the end of October, for example, 8th Army received 300 British cruiser (main battle) tanks, 300 American Stuart tanks, 170 ''I'' (infantry) tanks, 34,000 trucks, 600 guns, 80 anti-aircraft guns, and 900 mortars, plus tons of other equipment. Cunningham was reinforced with the 1st and 2nd South African Infantry Divisions, the British 70th Infantry Division (which took over garrison duties in Tobruk), the newly organized 1st and 32nd Army Tank Brigades, and New Zealand 2nd Infantry Division (rebuilt after Crete), and the 22nd Armoured Brigade of the 1st Armoured Division (the rest of the division was still on the way when the ''Crusader'' offensive began). Meanwhile, on the German side of the ''wire'' (as the Egyptian-Libyan border was called), the Desert Fox could barely even supply his men. In October, British air and naval forces operating out of Malta sank a whopping 63 percent of the tonnage bound for Rommel, and only 18,500 tons reached North Africa. The troops' rations, which were already bad, grew even worse.

The disastrous supply situation forced Hitler to take action to restore the balance of power in the central Mediterranean or else run the risk of losing the Afrika Korps to starvation. He withdrew the 2nd Air Fleet from the Russian Front and sent it to Italy. Its commander, Field Marshal Kesselring, was simultaneously named commander-in-chief, South (OB South) on November 28. Although for the moment he was only allowed control over the II and X Air Corps and the relatively small

Air Command Afrika, this energetic officer was determined to restore German control over the sea lanes to Libya. By the time his air wings arrived in strength, however, Rommel had already lost the supply race and the British Winter Offensive of 1941 was well under way. Panzer Group Afrika faced it with only 15 percent of the supplies that it needed. Table 34.1 shows the Order of Battle of both sides in November 1941.

OPERATION CRUSADER

General Cunningham's plan to relieve Tobruk (dubbed Operation Crusader) called for XXX Corps (with all three British armored brigades) to cross the frontier on the desert flank between Sidi Omar and Fort Maddalena and attack northwest, towards Tobruk. This, the British thought, would force Rommel to engage them in a tank battle early in the campaign. Meanwhile, the British XIII Corps on the coastal flank would put down the German coastal garrisons. When General Norrie thought the time was right, Major General Ronald M. Scobie (the new commander of Tobruk) would break out of the perimeter and link up with XXX Corps in the vicinity of Sidi Rezegh, breaking the siege and possibly cutting off a substantial part of the Afrika Korps. Events, however, did not unfold according to plan.

The British had 748 tanks when the battle began: 213 Matildas and Valenines, 220 Crusaders, 150 other heavy cruiser-model tanks, and 165 light American Stuarts, which the British used as main battle tanks in this battle. The Matilda (26.5 tons) was heavily armored and boasted a two-pounder main battle gun, but, like almost all British-manufactured tanks, it was slow and could average only six mph over the desert. Its replacement, the Valentine, weighed 16 tons and averaged eight mph in the desert. The Crusader, the main British cruiser in this offensive, weighed 19 tons, fired a two-pounder gun, and equaled the PzKw III and IV in speed, but was mechanically unreliable. The American M-3 Stuart tank was probably the best Allied tank in Operation Crusader. Originally designed as a light or reconnaissance tank, it weighed only 12.5 tons, had a 37-millimeter main battle gun (which was slightly better than the two-pounder), and was the fastest tank in 8th Army. Like the Americans, the British called it the ''Honey,'' because it was easy to handle and was so mechanically reliable.

On the other side of the line, Panzer Group Afrika could commit only 249 German and 146 Italian tanks.[2] The latter varied in quality from marginal to almost useless. The Germans were also heavily outnumbered in the air—650 airplanes to 120 for the Luftwaffe. Two hundred Italian airplanes were also available, but they were of no great value. Figure 34.1 shows the initial phase of the battle.

Table 34.1
Order of Battle of Opposing Forces, Operation Crusader, November 1941

Panzer Group Afrika: General Erwin Rommel
- Afrika Korps: Lieutenant General Ludwig Cruewell
  - 21st Panzer Division
  - 15th Panzer Division
- 90th Light Division[a]
- Italian XX Motorized Corps[b]
  - Ariete Armored Division
  - Trieste Motorized Division
  - Trento Motorized Division[a]
- Italian XXI Infantry Corps[c]
  - Pavia Division[c]
  - Bologna Division[c]
  - Brescia Division[c]
  - Savona Division

British 8th Army: General Sir Alan Cunningham
- XXX Corps: Lieutenant General C. W. M. Norrie
  - 7th Armoured Division: Major General W. H. E. Gott
    - 7th Armoured Brigade
    - 22nd Armoured Brigade
    - 4th Armoured Brigade
    - 7th Support Group
  - 1st South African Infantry Division: Major General George Brink
    - 1st South African Infantry Brigade
    - 5th South African Infantry Brigade
  - 22nd Guards Brigade: Brigadier J. C. O. Marriot
- XIII Corps: Lieutenant General A. R. Godwin-Austen
  - 2nd New Zealand Infantry Division: Major General J. C. Freyberg
    - 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade
    - 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade
    - 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade
  - 4th Indian Infantry Division: Major General F.W. Messervy
    - 5th Indian Infantry Brigade
    - 7th Indian Infantry Brigade
    - 11th Indian Infantry Brigade
  - 1st Army Tank Brigade: Brigadier H. R. B. Watkins
- Tobruk Garrison: Major General R. M. Scobie
  - 70th Infantry Division: Scobie
    - 14th Infantry Brigade
    - 16th Infantry Brigade
    - 23rd Infantry Brigade
  - 32nd Army Tank Brigade: Brigadier A. C. Wilson
  - 1st Polish Carpathian Infantry Brigade: Major General S. Kopanski

Table 34.1 (*continued*)

8th Army Reserve:
2nd South African Infantry Division: Major General I. P. de Villiers
3rd South African Infantry Brigade
4th South African Infantry Brigade
6th South African Infantry Brigade
29th Indian Infantry Brigade: Brigadier D. W. Reid

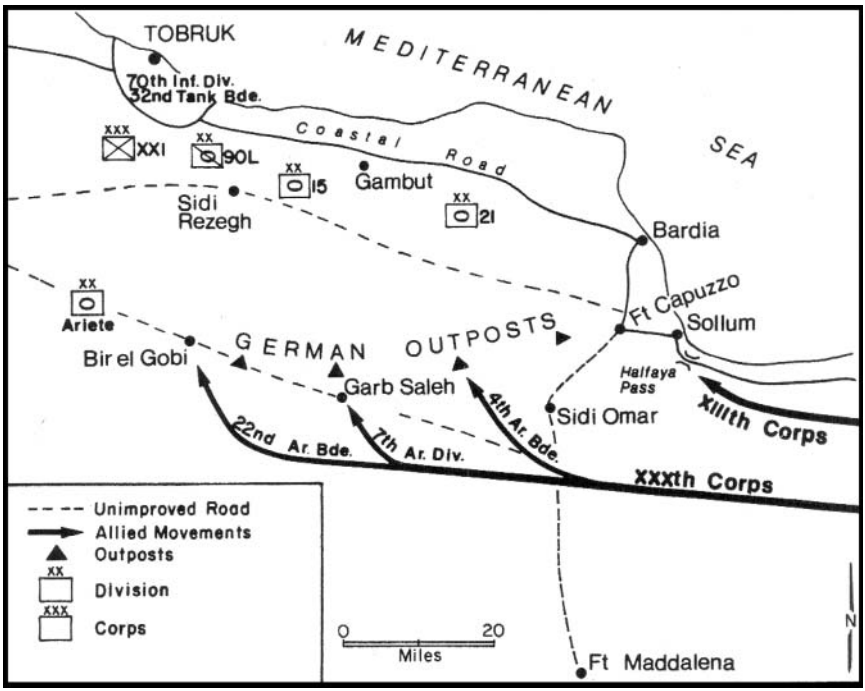
Notes:
[a]Not completely formed.
[b]Ordered to coordinate with Rommel but not officially subordinated to Panzer Group Afrika until late November 1941.
[c]Besieging Tobruk.

The British XXX Corps first met the enemy (elements of the Savona Division) on the morning of November 18 and began a desert battle of unprecedented fury which lasted, almost without pause, for three weeks. Even today it is difficult to describe.

On November 18, the British pushed back Savona, the 21st Panzer Division and the two German panzer reconnaissance battalions. On the morning of the 19th, however, Rommel committed 15th Panzer Division to the battle on the frontier. His improvised plan was a bit of a gamble and was based on the assumption that the British would scatter their armor all over the desert, as usual, and not concentrate them in a single thrust aimed for Tobruk. He was right, and this enabled Rommel and Cruewell to defeat the Allied tank units piecemeal, even though the 21st Panzer Division was totally immobilized all morning on November 20, due to a lack of fuel. The British 22nd Armoured Brigade and the 5th South African Infantry Brigade did succeed in reaching Sidi Rezegh, a village less than 10 miles from the Tobruk perimeter, on November 20, but Rommel contained it with the 90th Light and the Afrika Korps' artillery reserve (the 104th Artillery Command under Major General Karl Boettcher); meanwhile, Cruewell looped behind the British and slowly crushed them with the Afrika Korps, despite fierce and courageous resistance. The battle lasted until November 23. More than 300 British tanks had been destroyed since the offensive began and another 150 were heavily damaged. The Afrika Korps, however, also suffered heavy losses and had only 90 operational panzers remaining.

At this point, Rommel convinced himself that the 8th Army was on the run, and that a thrust into the British rear would stampede it into a headlong retreat, if not a rout. General Cruewell opposed the raid, but Rommel could not be swayed. At 10:30 A.M. on November 24, he began his famous ''dash to the wire'' with the Afrika Korps. He quickly broke through and scattered several British corps staffs and rear area units,

Figure 34.1
Operation Crusader, Phase 1



but did no real damage to the 8th Army's capacity to wage war. His raid also strung out the Afrika Korps over 40 miles of desert. While Rommel raced about in the rear of the 8th Army for three days, the British recovered. Auchinleck sacked Cunningham and replaced him with Major General Sir Neil Ritchie, a man of little command experience but one who knew how to take orders. In this case, his orders were uncompromising: 8th Army was to win this battle or never return. As a result, General Ritchie rallied his forces southeast of Tobruk and did not retreat, as Rommel expected.

The ''dash to the wire'' was a disastrous failure. When Rommel returned to his headquarters after his fruitless raid, the situation had changed markedly. The British XIII Corps had encircled the German and Italian garrisons at Halfaya Pass, Sollum and Bardia on the coast, and the reinforced 2nd New Zealand Division had retaken Sidi Rezegh, while the 32nd Army Tank Brigade of the Tobruk garrison had broken out and taken El Duda, only three miles north of Sidi Rezegh. The Afrika Korps arrived at almost the last possible moment and prevented the two Allied forces from linking up. The Italians wanted to abandon

the Siege of Tobruk and retreat, but—despite his exhaustion and that of his men—Rommel decided to attack instead. On November 28, the DAK struck but was unable to destroy the New Zealanders, and General von Ravenstein, the dashing commander of the 21st Panzer, was captured. He was replaced by Major General Boettcher.

By now, both sides were at the end of their tether. Rommel's decision to attack again on November 30 is striking proof of his will power and determination. Taking the chance that the Tobruk garrison would not launch a major offensive, Rommel hit the New Zealanders with all available forces, including the entire Afrika Korps and elements of the 90th Light Division. By December 1, he had overrun one brigade, surrounded the division, and cut it in two. That night, the New Zealanders broke out of the pocket, losing another 1,000 men and 26 guns in the process. The 1st Army Tank Brigade also escaped, but it was down to a strength of only 10 tanks. Rommel had restored the Siege of Tobruk and, for the moment at least, seemed to have won the battle. During of night of December 1–2, Rommel signaled Hitler that his forces had destroyed 814 enemy tanks and scout cars, 127 enemy airplanes, and had taken 9,000 prisoners. His own losses were 142 tanks and 25 armored cars and more than 4,000 German soldiers, including 17 commanding officers. The Afrika Korps had only 80 operational tanks left and was virtually out of supplies.[3] Many of the tanks were running on captured British fuel.

Contrary to Rommel's hopes, the Crusader battle was not yet over. General Ritchie had a strong streak of the famous bulldog tenacity that characterizes the British, and resolutely he rallied his forces, summoned his reserves (two infantry divisions and two independent brigades), and struck again on December 4. By nightfall, Ritchie's spearheads were near Sidi Rezegh, only two miles from the garrison. That night, Rommel withdrew the Italian Bologna Infantry Division and his few mobile forces east of Tobruk through this narrow corridor. This move effectively lifted the Siege of Tobruk after 242 days.

Rommel, always the last to give up, regrouped rapidly and launched another attack (this one on Bir el Gubi) on December 6 and 7, in one last attempt to disperse Ritchie's forces and chase the garrison back into the fortress. The attempt failed, and Major General Neumann-Silkow, the commander of the 15th Panzer Division, was mortally wounded by a shell burst in one of the last attacks (he died on December 9). That night, Panzer Army Afrika began retreating to the west. Erwin Rommel had suffered his first defeat.

On December 9, Major General Max Suemmermann, the commander of the 90th Light Division, was killed in an air attack. He was soon replaced by Major General Richard Veith. Rommel had lost all three of his German divisional commanders in a single campaign and the

Afrika Korps was now down to 33 operational tanks. It evacuated Benghazi on December 24 and finally halted at the Mersa el Brega line on January 12, 1942. Meanwhile, 450 miles to the east, back on the Libyan-Egyptian frontier, time was running out for the trapped garrisons at Bardia, Sollum, and Halfaya Pass.

Major General Artur Schmitt, the former commander of the panzer group's rear area and now leader of the ad hoc Division Bardia, put up a skillful defense, even though he knew his position was hopeless in the long run. He surrendered the town on January 2, 1942, about 48 hours after he lost his last water hole. Some 2,200 German troops (mostly from the administrative services) and 4,400 Italians were captured, and more than 1,100 Allies prisoners were liberated when Bardia fell.

Sollum was defended with equal skill by the two companies of the 300th Oasis Reserve Battalion. It fell on January 12, when the Germans ran out of ammunition. The agony of Sollum ended after a siege of 56 days.

Halfaya Pass was defended by Italian Major General Fedele de Giorgis of the Savona Division and by Major Reverend Wilhelm ''Papa'' Bach, the former Mannheim chaplain and commander of the I Battalion of the 104th Motorized Infantry Regiment. The defenders included 4,200 Italians and 2,100 Germans. They did not surrender until January 17, 1942.

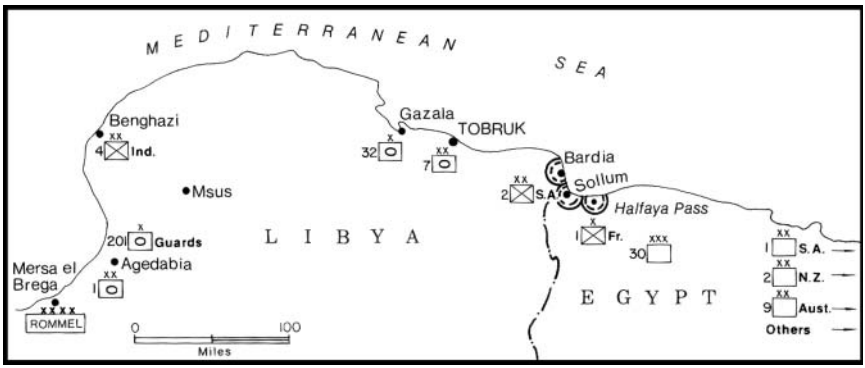
The loss of the frontier garrisons cost Rommel 14,000 men, of whom 4,000 were German. These losses ran Rommel's casualties for Crusader to 38,200 men or 32 percent of his original force. Most of them were Italian infantry; the Savona Division, for example, had ceased to exist. A total of 14,600 Germans were killed, wounded, or captured. The Allies lost 17,700 men killed, wounded, or captured.

THE SECOND CYRENAICAN CAMPAIGN

The senior British generals thought that their victory in Operation Crusader signaled the beginning of the end for Erwin Rommel and the Afrika Korps and began building up for a final drive on Tripoli. In the process, they scattered their units all over the map (see Figure 34.2). All they left in the forward zone was one brigade of the inexperienced 1st Armoured Division and the 201st Guards Brigade. In all, the British had only about 150 tanks at the front.

Meanwhile, however, Field Marshal Kesselring's 2nd Air Fleet began to pound Malta, which rapidly lost its offensive capacity. In January 1942, a major convoy docked in Tripoli. It delivered 55 new panzers, 20 armored cars, and a large quantity of fuel, food, and ammunition. Rommel at once began to think about taking the offensive again. By January 19, the Afrika Korps had 111 tanks, with 28 in reserve. Realizing that the higher councils in Rome were thoroughly infiltrated by the

Figure 34.2
British Dispositions, January 1942



British Secret Service, Rommel informed the Italians that he was planning to abandon the Mersa el Brega line. Auchinleck received word of this ''plan'' within hours. British aerial reconnaissance also revealed that Rommel was preparing to retreat. They did not know that he was secretly bringing his tanks up at night or under the cover of sandstorms and hiding them under camouflaged nets. The Desert Fox also withheld information from OKW, OKH, and Fuehrer Headquarters as well, because he was afraid his enemies there (Keitel, Jodl, and Halder) might try to interfere with his plans or inform the Italians as to what he was up to.

To everyone's surprise, Rommel unleashed his attack on the night of January 21–22, and the 1st Armoured Division was slaughtered. By the time the campaign was over, it had lost 100 of its 150 tanks, 33 artillery pieces, most of its divisional staff, and thousands of men. ''Now the tables are turned with a vengeance,'' Rommel wrote to his son. ''We've got the British by the short hairs, and I'm going to tear their hair out by the roots.''[4]

By January 25, the forward elements of the 8th Army had totally panicked. Colonel von Mellenthin recalled that ''the pursuit attained a speed of 15 mph, and the British fled madly over the desert in one of the most extraordinary routs of the war.''[5] The 15th Panzer Division advanced an incredible 50 miles in only four hours. After the first five days of the counteroffensive, the British had lost 299 tanks and armored vehicles, 147 guns, and 935 prisoners. Rommel reported his own losses at three officers, 11 enlisted men, and three tanks.[6]

The Desert Fox retook Benghazi at noon on January 30. The Arab population cheered the Germans and greeted them as liberators, just as

they had done for the British less than two months before. A thousand men from the 4th Indian Division were trapped inside the city and surrendered when it fell. Shortly after he reentered the Cyrenaican capital, Rommel received a message from Mussolini, suggesting that he retake Benghazi. Rommel sent back a curt reply, ''Benghazi already taken.''[7]

During the Second Cyrenacian campaign, the 8th Army lost more tanks than Erwin Rommel had. For the Desert Fox, this victory was filled with honors. On January 22, Panzer Group Afrika was upgraded to Panzer Army Afrika, and Hitler awarded him the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords and promoted him to colonel general to date from January 30, the day Benghazi fell.

NOTES

1. Strawson, p. 61.
2. Mellenthin, p. 63. These figures exclude British Mark VIB light tanks and Italian L-3s, which Mellenthin described as ''quite useless.''
3. Carell, *Foxes*, p. 90, W. G. F. Jackson, *The Battle for North Africa* (1975), p. 178 (hereafter cited as Jackson, *North Africa*).
4. David Irving, *The Trail of the Fox* (1977), p. 156 (hereafter cited as Irving, *Trail*).
5. Mellenthin, p. 104.
6. Irving, *Trail*, p. 155; Playfair, vol. 3, pp. 148–49; Carell, *Foxes*, pp. 134–35.
7. Mellenthin, p. 105.

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CHAPTER XXXV
CRISIS IN THE DESERT

Following Rommel's second conquest of Cyrenaica, a lull descended on the North African Front. This time, however, Rommel's sea lanes were clear and supplies poured into Tripoli and Benghazi. In March, 93 percent of the supplies dispatched from Italy actually arrived, and in April the total reached an unprecedented 99 percent. Kesselring's air raids against Malta continued with unabated fury; the Luftwaffe dropped 2,000 tons of bombs on the island in March and 7,000 in April. The Royal Air Force was driven off of the island, and now it was Malta's turn to starve. In March, for example, only 5,000 of the 26,000 tons of supplies bound for the island-fortress actually reached port.

At the same time, Grand Admiral Raeder persuaded a lukewarm Hitler to cooperate with the Italians for a joint invasion of Malta. The airborne and seaborne landings were timed for the full-moon phase of June. Six Italian divisions were assigned to take part in the invasion, along with 30,000 German and Italian paratroopers, who were training under the elite Nazi airborne specialist, Major General Hermann Ramcke. The total force involved 100,000 men and 500 transport aircraft, excluding Kesselring's fighters, bombers, and dive-bombers. The British had only 30,000 men on the island to oppose the invasion, with little prospect for reinforcement.

Meanwhile, in the desert, Ludwig Cruewell (now a general of panzer troops) was named deputy commander of Panzer Army Afrika, and Lieutenant General Walter Nehring replaced him as commander of the Afrika Korps. Major General Georg von Bismarck was named commander of the 21st Panzer Division and Major General Gustav von Vaerst, a veteran of Poland, Belgium, France, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Russia, took charge of the 15th Panzer Division.[1] All were experienced and talented leaders.

On the other side, the British were busy constructing an extremely strong defensive position, extending from the Mediterranean Sea to

Bir Hacheim, 40 miles inland. (A Bir, in theory at least, is a water hole.) Colonel von Mellenthin described it as a mining operation ''on a scale never yet seen in war.''[2] More than a million mines were laid. The position, called the Gazala Line, included several isolated strongpoints, called ''boxes,'' which were designed to cover the minefields and prevent the Axis forces from breaching them. The boxes were usually two miles in diameter and garrisoned by a reinforced brigade.

Even without the Galaza Line, the Allies had tremendous advantages, including a two to one superiority over the Germans in armor. Rommel's chief intelligence officer put the Panzer Army's strength at 333 German and 228 Italian tanks, against 900 British tanks.[3] Major General Playfair's figures are similar (see Table 35.1). In addition, the Nazi war machine had lost whatever technical superiority it had over the Western Allies when the Grant tank arrived in the desert. This American-made vehicle weighed 30 tons (more than any existing panzer) and had two main battle guns: a 75 millimeter and a 37 millimeter. The only tank Rommel had which could equal the 75-millimeter cannon was the high-velocity 50-millimeter gun on the PzKw III (Special), and there were only 19 of these in the entire panzer army. Ritchie had 167 Grants with his armored divisions when the battle began. In addition, the Allies had a 10 to 1 superiority in armored cars, 8 to 5 in artillery, and 6 to 5.5 in aircraft, even if the inferior Italian airplanes are taken into account.[4] ''Perhaps fortunately, we underestimated British strength,'' Rommel's chief of intelligence admitted later, ''for had we known the full facts even Rommel might have balked at an attack on such a greatly superior enemy.''[5] Table 35.2 shows the opposing forces in May 1942.

Table 35.1
Opposing Tank Strength, North Africa, May 1942

	Allies		Axis	
Medium tanks	Grants	167	PzKw IIIs	242
	Crusaders	257	PzKw IVs	40
Total with armored divisions		424		282
	''I'' tanks	276	PzKw IIs	50
Light tanks	Stuarts	149	Italian Mediums	228
GRAND TOTALS		849		560

Source:
I.S.O. Playfair, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Volume III (1960), p. 220.

Table 35.2
Opposing Forces, Battle of the Gazala Line, May 1942

ALLIED FORCES: British 8th Army: General Sir Neill Ritchie
- Front Line:
- XIII Corps: Lieutenant General William H. E. Gott
  - 1st South African Division
    - 3rd, 2nd, and 7th South African Brigades
  - 50th Infantry Division
    - 151st, 69th, and 150th Infantry Brigades
  - 1st Free French Brigade
- Reserves:
- XXX Corps: Major General Willoughby Norrie
  - 2nd South African Division
    - 6th and 4th South African Brigades, 29th Indian Brigade
  - 32nd Army Tank Brigade
  - 1st Army Tank Brigade
  - 1st Armoured Division
    - 2nd and 22nd Armoured Brigades, 201st Guards Brigade
  - 7th Armoured Division
    - 4th Armoured Brigade; 7th and 3rd Indian Motor Brigades
  - 29th Indian Motor Brigade

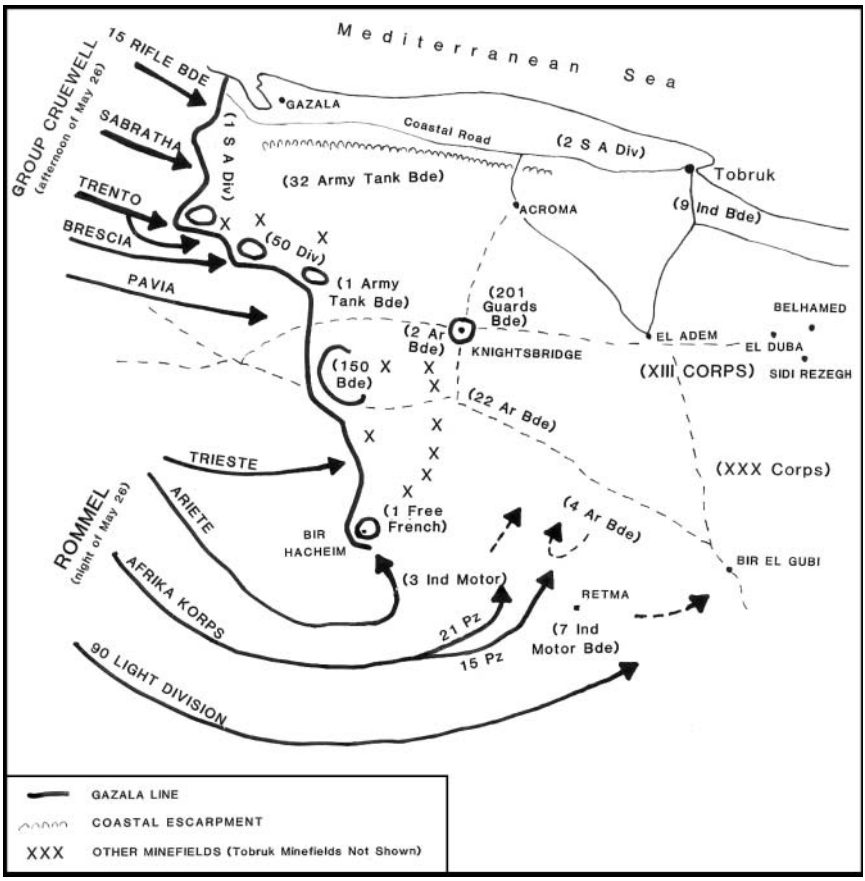
AXIS FORCES: Panzer Army Afrika: Colonel General Erwin Rommel
- Pinning Forces: General of Panzer Troops Ludwig Cruewell
  - 15th German Rifle Brigade[a]
  - XXI Italian Infantry Corps
    - Sabratha Infantry Division
    - Trento Infantry Division
  - X Italian Corps
    - Brescia Infantry Division
    - Pavia Infantry Division
- Strike Forces: Colonel General Rommel
  - XX Italian Motorized Corps
    - Trieste Motorized Division
    - Ariete Armored Division
  - Afrika Korps: General of Panzer Troops Walter Nehring
    - 21st Panzer Division
      - 5th Panzer Regiment, 104th Motorized Infantry Regiment, 155th Panzer Artillery Regiment, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion,[b] 200th Panzer Engineer Bn.
    - 15th Panzer Division
      - 8th Panzer Regiment, 115th Motorized Infantry Regiment, 33rd Panzer Artillery Regiment, 33rd Reconnaissance Battalion,[b] 33rd Panzer Engineer Bn.
    - 90th Light Division
      - 155th, 200th, and 361st Motorized Infantry Regiments, 190th Motorized Artillery Regiment, 580th Reconnaissance Battalion, 900th Motorized Engineer Battalion.

Notes:
[a]Consisted mainly of the 361st Motorized Infantry Regiment and other detached elements of the 90th Light Division.
[b]Temporarily attached to the 90th Light Division.

THE BATTLE OF THE GAZALA LINE

As impressive as the Gazala Line defensive network was, it had one major deficiency: it could be outflanked. Once again, the British leaders refused to recognize that their left (desert) flank was vulnerable. Rommel planned to divide his forces into two parts: Group Cruewell in the north and center, and the strike force in the south. Group Cruewell was to feint against the Gazala Line, while Rommel rounded it to the south. Then the XX Italian Motorized Corps was to capture the southern anchor of the Gazala Line at Bir Hacheim (a box held by the 1st Free French Brigade), while Rommel smashed the British armor in 8th Army's rear. Figure 35.1 shows the details of this plan and the first

Figure 35.1
The Gazala Line, Phase 1



phase of the battle. Events proved that Rommel's plan was overly ambitious.

As usual, Rommel struck before the Allies were ready. He launched his offensive at 10:30 P.M. on the night of May 26 and was well behind the Gazala Line by daybreak. He wheeled north with the bulk of the Afrika Korps and smashed the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade, while the 90th Light captured the Retma Box, overran the 7th Motor Brigade, and disrupted the rear of the British XXX Corps. Meanwhile, with the main body, the Afrika Korps caught the 4th Armoured Brigade before it could completely deploy. Here, Rommel had his first nasty surprise of the campaign: the Grant tank. Colonel Gerhard Mueller, the commander of the 5th Panzer Regiment, led his men directly into the middle of the fray, and he was followed by Rommel, Nehring, and von Vaerst. The fighting was fierce and the panzer units suffered severe casualties, but the superior numbers and the greater tactical skill of the German commanders made the difference in the end. One of the two regiments of the 4th Armoured was almost wiped out, and the other suffered heavy losses, including 16 Grants.

As the remnants of the 4th Armoured fell back, the Afrika Korps surged forward into the rear of the 7th Armoured Division, capturing its divisional headquarters and temporarily eliminating it as a cohesive combat unit.

Seeing the confusion and disorganization his surprise offensive had caused, Rommel decided to pursue in the direction of the Trigh Capuzzo. He wanted to be at Acroma by nightfall—a move which would isolate the bulk of Gott's XIII Corps in the Gazala Line. He expected this maneuver to force Ritchie to commit the rest of his armor into a frontal battle against the Afrika Korps—one he felt sure he would win. For once, however, he was outwitted by his opponent. Ritchie avoided a frontal confrontation with the DAK; instead, he let the panzer spearheads pass west of Knightsbridge and then struck Rommel's supporting columns in both flanks with the 2nd Armoured and 1st Army Tank Brigades. The unexpected counterattacks completely cut off the Afrika Korps from the rest of the panzer army. Now, Rommel was in the trap.

During the night of May 27, the Germans located the 150th Brigade Box, which was just a few miles west-southwest of Rommel's camp. The British 150th Infantry blocked Rommel's path to the west and prevented the Trieste and Pavia divisions from breaching the Gazala minefields and sending supplies to the trapped strike force. The Afrika Korps was reduced to a water ration of a half a cup per day and was in real danger of annihilation.

General Cruewell promptly devised a plan to break through to his encircled comrades and flew toward the front in a Storch light

observation plane to make the final preparations for the attack. A junior officer was supposed to have fired flares when Cruewell's airplane neared friendly lines but, as fate would have it, he was called to the telephone just as the general's airplane appeared. Cruewell suddenly found himself over enemy lines at an altitude of only 500 feet. Enemy machine-gun bullets ripped through the light airplane, killing the pilot instantly and knocking out the engine. The general, who was in the back seat (there was only one in the front), was helpless. Miraculously, the stricken airplane landed itself. An unwounded Ludwig Cruewell was pulled out of the Storch by British soldiers. For him, the war was over. Germany had lost one of its best and most promising panzer commanders; and, without him, the attack by the Italian Sabratha Division produced nothing.

Meanwhile, in the pocket, the British failed to concentrate their greatly superior strength against the Afrika Korps, and the fighting was indecisive. During the night of May 29–30, Rommel established defensive positions in an area that soon became famous as ''the Cauldron.'' He decided to turn back to the east, destroy the 150th Brigade in its box at Got el Ualeb, and reestablish contact with the rest of the panzer army. Meanwhile, Ritchie made a number of unconcentrated and uncoordinated attempts to destroy the Afrika Korps. He and Norrie, however, were preoccupied with the planning of ''Limerick,'' an offensive against the Italian contingent facing the Gazala Line. They never seemed to be fully prepared to launch it and kept postponing it from day to day, leaving Rommel free to deal with the 150th Brigade with the majority of his original strike force.

On May 30, the 150th (with the 44th Royal Tank Regiment attached) had more than 3,000 men, 124 guns, 80 heavy Matilda tanks, and plenty of food, water, and ammunition. It was attacked by the entire Italian XX Motorized Corps, as well as the 90th Light Division and the bulk of the Afrika Korps. The stubborn defenders put up a valiant fight and held off the equivalent of two corps for three days, but were finally forced to surrender on the afternoon of June 1. The Gazala Line had been breached and the Afrika Korps had been saved. The cost to the Afrika Korps had not been light, however. Among others, Rommel had lost Colonel Siegfried Westphal, his operations officer, who had been seriously wounded by British mortar fire. General Gause, the chief of staff of the Afrika Korps, had also been wounded, as had General von Vaerst, the commander of the 15th Panzer Division, who would be convalescing for months. Many generals would have called off the battle at this point, after narrowly escaping annihilation and losing so many of his top subordinates; Rommel, however, turned south, to deal with the southern anchor of the Gazala Line.

The Bir Hacheim Box was defended by the 1st Free French Brigade, which was supplemented by a battalion of Jews: more than 4,000

determined and desperate men, holding a well-prepared position behind deep minefields. As was the case with the 150th Infantry, the British generals remained inexcusably inactive while Rommel concentrated against Bir Hacheim. They did not attack until June 5; then, using about half of their available armor, they launched another unconcentrated and poorly coordinated series of frontal assaults against the Cauldron. The worst of these was against Sidra Ridge, the northern face of the Cauldron, where the 32nd Army Tank Brigade conducted what Colonel von Mellenthin later denounced as ''one of the most ridiculous attacks of the campaign.''[6] Supported by only 12 guns, it attacked frontally, with very little infantry (one battalion), in broad daylight across open terrain: a perfect target for the defenders. It was slaughtered by the 21st Panzer Division. Then it retreated—into a minefield. The 32nd lost 50 of its 70 tanks and was temporarily finished as a factor in the battle. On the eastern side of the pocket, the 22nd Armoured Brigade lost 60 tanks. The 10th Indian, 2nd Armoured, and 4th Armoured Brigades also suffered losses in the piecemeal frontal assaults. After the Allies had shot their bolt, Rommel launched a double envelopment, with the 21st Panzer Division forcing the British right flank back on its center, while the 15th Panzer Division (now led by Colonel Eduard Crasemann) emerged from the minefields and hit the British left. The Afrika Korps overran the headquarters of the 5th Indian and 7th Armoured Divisions and encircled the 9th and 10th Indian Brigades, four artillery regiments, and much of the 22nd Armoured Brigade. Some of the trapped soldiers managed to escape during the night, but, when the pocket was cleared the next day, the Desert Fox took 3,100 prisoners and captured 96 guns and 37 anti-tank weapons. Many Allied tanks and guns were destroyed, to keep them from falling into German hands.

With the Allied armor temporarily neutralized, Rommel created a new combat group from his engineer units (the 33rd, 200th, and 900th Panzer Engineer Battalions), placed it under Colonel Hans Hecker, the Panzer Army engineer officer, and ordered him to penetrate the minefields, so the 90th Light could crush the Bir Hacheim pocket. On June 8, Hecker succeeded in killing or capturing most of the Jewish battalion. When Hitler heard the news, he sent Rommel an order to shoot his Jewish prisoners. As was often the case with orders he did not like, this one simply disappeared. The Jewish soldiers were treated humanely and then turned over to the Italians, who treated them as regular prisoners of war.

Rommel regrouped on June 9 and reinforced Group Hecker with Lieutenant Colonel Ernst Baade's 115th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. The next day, the defenses began to crack. That night, French General Pierre Koenig broke out with most of his command. The following

morning, when Bir Hacheim finally fell, the 90th Light took only 500 prisoners, and most of these were wounded; however, the 1st Free French was temporarily eliminated, and the road to Tobruk was clear of all obstacles but one: the British armored forces in the vicinity of the Knightsbridge Box.

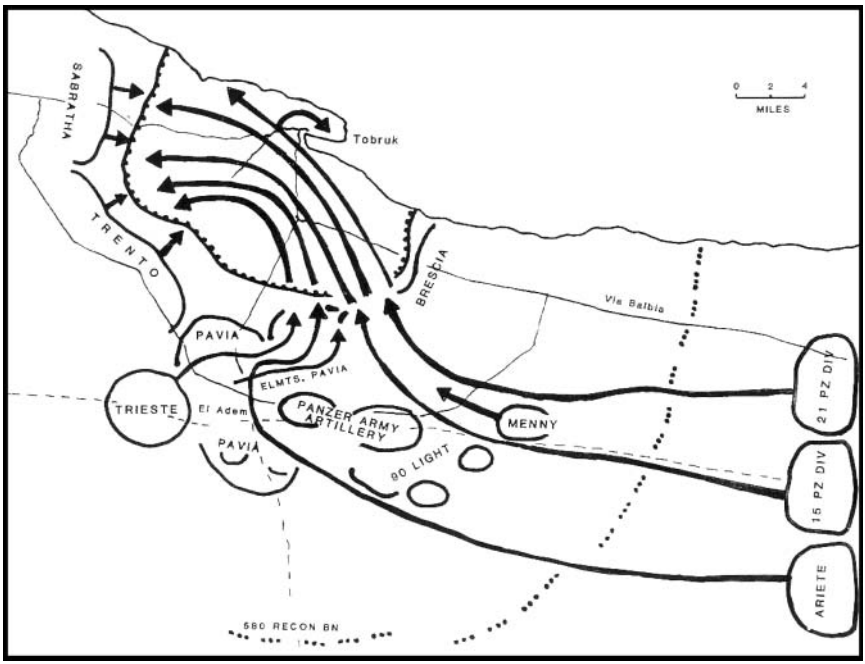
As late as June 11, more than two weeks after the Battle of the Gazala Line began, Ritchie still had about 330 tanks (250 cruisers and 80 infantry tanks), as opposed to Rommel's 230 tanks, of which only 160 were of German manufacture. (Many of the tanks on both sides had been hastily repaired.) German casualties had been heavy, and the 90th Light was down to a strength of 1,000 men. That night, General Norrie, the commander of the XXX Corps, gave his orders for the next day. The 7th Armoured Division would deal with the 15th Panzer, while the 1st Armoured Division took on the 21st Panzer. Unfortunately for the Allies, they violated radio security, the German Wireless Intercept Service picked up the signal, and informed Rommel of the British plans. The Desert Fox was thus able to set up an ambush and caught the 7th Armoured Division between the two panzer divisions of the Afrika Korps. The 2nd and 4th Armoured Brigades were smashed; between them they lost 100 to 120 tanks.

THE FALL OF TOBRUK

Erwin Rommel wasted no time in ordering a pursuit of his battered opponents. On June 13, he defeated the 1st Armoured Division in the Battle of Acroma and temporarily finished it as a battleworthy unit. By now, Ritchie had only 70 operational tanks, and the 1st and 7th Armoured Divisions were retreating toward the frontier. The 1st South African Infantry Division now pulled out of the Gazala Line, which Rommel had outflanked, but it was too late for the 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division. It had to break out to the west, through the surprised Italians, and execute a wide sweep to the south, and then trek across the desert to the east. This bold move saved the division, but it had to abandon all of its heavy equipment in the process, temporarily eliminating yet another British division as a viable combat force. The Italians finished mopping up the Gazala Line on June 16, capturing 6,000 prisoners, thousands of tons of supplies, and entire convoys of undamaged vehicles in the process.

At this point, General Auchinleck wanted to abandon Tobruk and ordered Ritchie not to allow any part of 8th Army to be encircled in the fortress but, despite a categorical statement from the Royal Navy that it was not prepared to supply a second siege, Churchill ordered Tobruk held at all costs. Ritchie did have the promise of early help. With the U.S. Army arriving in the United Kingdom in strength,

Figure 35.2
Rommel's Plan of Attack on Tobruk, June 17, 1942



Churchill was able to release large forces for North Africa, including the 8th Armoured and 44th Infantry Divisions and 11 regiments of artillery. In addition, the 2nd New Zealand Division (now rebuilt) was on the way from Syria, and the 10th Armoured Division was already in Egypt. Churchill made a terrible mistake, however, for the situation in 1942 was fundamentally different than it was in 1941, and most of the brigades manning the defenses were no longer battleworthy. From June 16 to 18, Erwin Rommel invested the fortress and cut off the 2nd South African Infantry Division, along with the 11th Indian, 29th Indian, 201st Guards and 32nd Army Tank Brigades, inside of the Tobruk perimeter. Next, Rommel feinted to the east with his panzer forces, as if he intended to invade Egypt; then he doubled back on Tobruk to launch a surprise frontal attack on the fortress (see Figure 35.2).

At 5:20 A.M. on June 20, the Allied perimeter was blasted by hundreds of dive-bombers. By 8:30 A.M., the 15th Panzer Division (personally led by General Nehring) was rushing north, and Rommel had his breakthrough. The remnants of the 32nd Army Tank launched a

belated counterattack at 10 A.M., but it was too late, and the brigade was wiped out. By 2 P.M., Rommel was deep in the British rear. He sent the 15th Panzer Division in the direction of Fort Pilastrino, to deal with the 201st Guards Brigade and finish off the British armor; the honor of capturing Tobruk went to Georg von Bismarck and the 21st Panzer Division.

Bismarck broke into Tobruk with such speed that several British ships were sunk by the divisional artillery and the panzers. By nightfall, two-thirds of the fortress was in German hands. It capitulated at 9:40 A.M. on June 21. Rommel had captured 32,000 men (19,000 British soldiers, 10,500 South Africans, and 2,500 Indians) and huge quantities of supplies.[7]

Erwin Rommel reached one of the pinnacles of his military career on June 22, 1942, when a grateful Hitler promoted him to field marshal. At 50, he was the youngest man yet to attain this, Nazi Germany's highest military rank. He celebrated in a typically restrained fashion. He ate a can of pineapples and had a small glass of well-watered whiskey from captured British supplies. After dinner, he wrote his wife, ''Hitler has made me a field marshal. I would much rather he had given me one more division.''[8]

THE INVASION OF EGYPT

When Tobruk fell, Rommel captured more than 2,000 vehicles and 14,000 tons of fuel. With this, he believed that he could lead his victorious but nearly exhausted army all the way to the Suez Canal. He was so carried away by his undeniably brilliant series of successes that he forgot his own earlier warning: ''Without Malta the Axis will end by losing control of North Africa.'' He cabled Lieutenant General Enno von Rintelen, the German military attaché in Rome, and requested that he ask Mussolini to lift the restriction on his freedom of maneuver and give him permission to invade Egypt. Kesselring, however, argued that Malta must be captured before an invasion of Egypt, or the Luftwaffe would not be able to properly support ground operations, because the pressure on the island would have to be maintained; even then the island might be able to recover its offensive potential and cut off Rommel's supplies. The Italian General Staff, the German Naval Staff, Mussolini, and von Rintelen all sided with Kesselring, but the final decision was, of course, left to the Fuehrer, and, since Crete, Hitler had not been an advocate of parachute operations. On June 22, he endorsed Rommel's plan to invade Egypt. Now definitely the junior member of the Axis partnership, Mussolini accepted Hitler's decision without a single argument. He was also lured east by the possibility of a triumphal march into Egypt and the further expansion of the Fascist Empire, after so many defeats.

Rommel's arguments did have considerable merit. With American industrial potential beginning to make itself felt on the side of the 8th Army, and with the bulk of the Wehrmacht decisively engaged on the Eastern Front, any chance of scoring a decisive victory had to be taken, because such an opportunity would not likely present itself again. Although he was proven to be wrong in fact (that is, in hindsight), he was certainly correct in theory, and, although Rommel failed, he failed striving for victory, not prolonged indecision. Had Kesselring's conservative approach been adopted, defeat in North Africa undoubtedly would have been delayed, but it would have happened nonetheless. At least Rommel's alternative offered the hope of victory.

Everything now depended on how fast Rommel could advance and how rapidly the British could recover. The Desert Fox began his invasion on June 23, barely allowing his own men time to pause.

The Afrika Korps had only 44 operational panzers when it crossed into Egypt, and the XX Italian Corps had only 14 tanks, 30 guns, and 2,000 men.[9] Despite the fact that it was bombed and strafed by more than 500 British combat airplanes, the DAK advanced more than 100 miles during the first 24 hours of the campaign. Rommel neared Matruh as night fell on June 25, and, because of the need for speed, threw his mobile forces into battle without conducting a thorough reconnaissance. He assumed that the British had four infantry divisions holding a line from Matruh and the sea to the southern edge of the coastal escarpments, and that their left (desert) flank was covered by the 1st Armoured Division. In fact, the 8th Army was divided into two wings. The X Corps on the north held Mersa Matruh and the sector from the sea to the Northern Escarpment with two infantry divisions. The sector south of the Southern Escarpment was held by Gott's XIII Corps, which included the 2nd New Zealand, 1st Armoured, and 5th Indian Divisions. In between the two forks of the escarpment, Ritchie had only two thin minefields and two battalion-sized motorized battle groups from the 29th Indian Brigade.

Rommel struck early on the afternoon of June 26. Thanks to the fast work of his mechanics, he now had 60 operational panzers; Auchinleck (who had relieved Ritchie and had taken personal command of the 8th Army) had 160 tanks, including 60 of the superb Grants. As luck would have it, however, the 90th Light and 21st Panzer Divisions struck the weakest part of the British line. The following morning, the 90th Light (reduced to 1,600 effectives) smashed the famous Durham Light Infantry Regiment 17 miles south of Matruh, and, shortly after nightfall on June 27, cut the Coastal Road east of Matruh, effectively isolating the X Corps. Meanwhile, to the south, the 15th Panzer and Italian XX Corps raged unsuccessfully against the British XIII Corps, while the 21st Panzer drove into the rear of the 2nd New Zealand

Division and scattered its main transport park. General Gott, who witnessed the flight of the New Zealand trucks, incorrectly concluded that Freyberg's division had been routed. Acting on this misconception, he ordered a general retreat for that night. Due to poor communications, however, this news did not reach Holmes's X Corps until early in the morning of June 28—too late from it to break out until the following evening.[10]

On June 28, Rommel sent the Afrika Korps in the direction of Fula and El Alamein, in pursuit of the XIII Corps, while the 90th Light Division and elements of the X and XXI Italian Infantry Corps stormed the fortress of Mersa Matruh. The attack began at 5 P.M. that evening and lasted all night. Another confused breakout attempt took place in the darkness, and approximately 60 percent of the X Corps escaped. Matruh fell the following morning. A rear guard of 6,000 men was captured, 40 Allied tanks were destroyed, and the 50th British and 10th Indian Infantry Divisions were temporarily *hors de combat*.

On June 29, numerous columns of the Axis and British X Corps vehicles streamed across the desert and along the Coastal Road, trying to avoid each other, all heading eastward. Rommel's leading elements were only 60 miles from Alexandria and the western distributary of the Nile. All that stood between him and a decisive victory was the British XXX Corps at El Alamein, the position that all of the British commanders now realized was the Allies' last ditch in North Africa.

NOTES

1. Bismarck had been in motorized or panzer units since 1923. He had served in Rommel's 7th Panzer Division during the French campaign.
2. Mellenthin, p. 93.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 94; Rommel Papers, p. 197; Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, p. 190.
5. Rommel Papers, p. 195.
6. Mellenthin, p. 109; also see Playfair, vol. 3, p. 232.
7. James P. Werbaneth, ''Helpful Conduct by the Enemy,'' *World War II*, vol. 7, no. 1 (May 1992), p. 28.
8. Young, *Rommel*, p.100.
9. Michael Carver, *El Alamein* (1962), p. 25 (hereafter cited as Carver); Rommel Papers, p. 236; B. H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (1972), vol. 1, p. 277.
10. General Freyberg was seriously wounded during this battle and was replaced by Brigadier Lindsay M. Inglis (1894–1966), who normally commanded the 4th New Zealand Brigade. He later commanded the 4th New Zealand Armored Brigade in Italy.

CHAPTER XXXVI

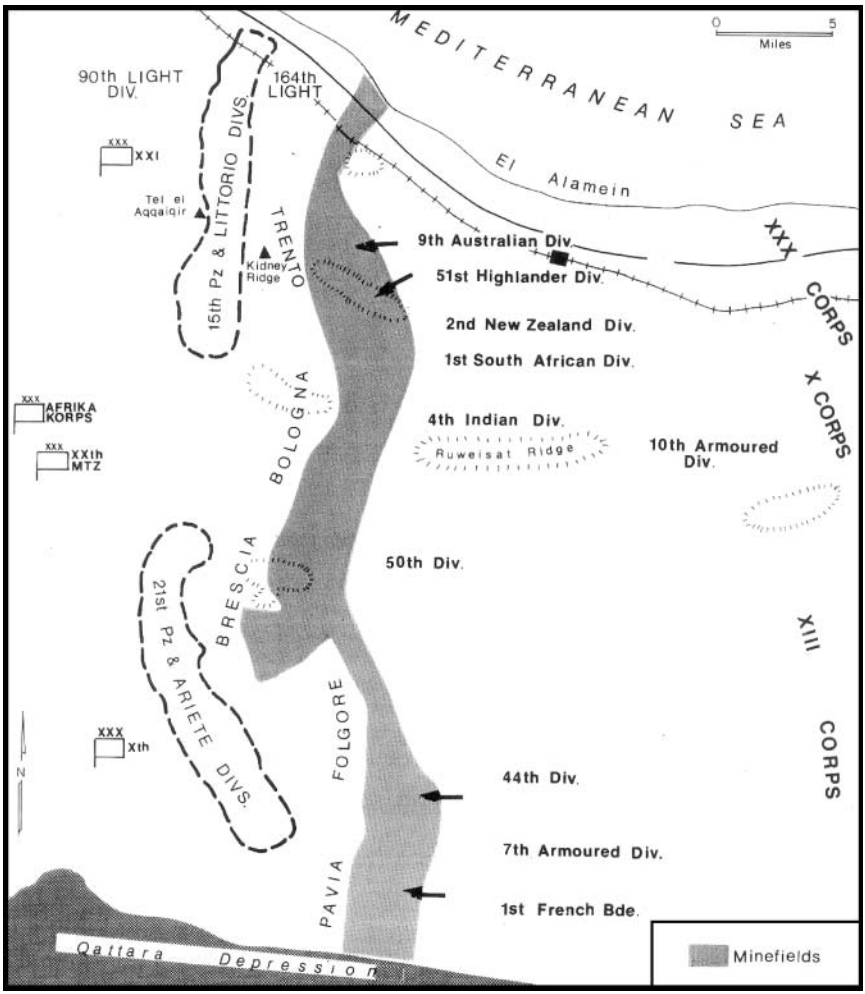
THE BATTLES OF EL ALAMEIN

THE FIRST BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

The Alamein position was almost the only unflankable position in the Western Desert. Forty miles south of El Alamein lay the Qattara Depression: a huge mixture of salt marshes and quicksand that was impassable to wheeled or tracked vehicles. This time, Rommel would not be able to go around the enemy's left flank. He would have to launch a frontal assault. Figure 36.1 shows the situation as of July 1.

Meanwhile, in Alexandria, panic set in. Diplomats, soldiers, and civilians alike had lost faith in the 8th Army's ability to deny Rommel his goals. The British fleet left the port of Alexandria as Rommel approached, and demolition squads prepared to blow up the harbor installations. Many civilians fled to Cairo, which suffered terrible traffic jams due to the emigration. Telltale smoke appeared from the British embassy: the diplomats were burning their secret papers. Meanwhile, various military headquarters evacuated the city; long columns of army trucks sped off in the direction of Palestine, while the few remaining combat worthy units of the X Corps dug in on the Nile; and General Auchinleck actually considered giving up Egypt and sending the 8th Army to the Sudan, Palestine, and Iraq.[1] The Rommel legend had grown to such an extent that his very name was enough to spread terror in the enemy's capitals. Unfortunately for him, Rommel had little left but his name. His entire German contingent consisted of 55 worn-out panzers, 15 armored scout cars, 77 field guns, 65 anti-tank guns (including a few 88s), and about 2,000 tired infantrymen. To make matters worse, his supply lines now collapsed completely. Of the 60,000 tons he needed each month, the Axis authorities could deliver only 3,000, mainly because the British were forewarned of the departure

Figure 36.1
El Alamein, July 1, 1942



times and routes of merchant convoys via ULTRA intercepts and by spies and traitors in Rome.

Rommel began the First Battle of El Alamein with only the vaguest idea of the British dispositions; however, at El Alamein, he was not as lucky as he had been at Mersa Matruh. The 90th Light lost its way and ran into the Alamein box instead of bypassing it. The 3rd South African Brigade kept it pinned down until a sandstorm provided it with cover to withdraw. Under the cover of the blowing sand, the 90th

moved south, but when the dust finally settled, the division found itself in open terrain among the South African brigades and within range of the 1st Armoured Division's artillery, which tore it to pieces; some elements panicked and the tough, veteran division was almost routed. Meanwhile, to the south, General Nehring led the Afrika Korps forward and ran into the 18th Indian. The courageous Indian brigade was annihilated, but the DAK lost 18 of its 55 remaining tanks. ''[T]he fighting edge of the Afrika Korps was finally blunted,'' Mellenthin wrote.[2]

Rommel attacked again on July 2, but was turned back by the South Africans and the 1st Armoured Division. He planned to launch a concentrated assault on the Alamein Box on July 3, but Auchinleck beat him to the punch, and sent the 2nd New Zealand Division forward in a bayonet charge against the Ariete. The best Italian unit in Panzer Army Afrika broke and ran, leaving behind 28 of its 30 field guns and several tanks. To meet this threat to his desert flank, the field marshal was forced to pull the 15th Panzer Division out of his main attack and send it south. As a result, the attack on the Alamein Box failed.

Rommel now had no choice but to admit defeat and go over to the defensive, awaiting the arrival of the X and XXI Italian Infantry Corps, which were marching toward the front—perfect targets for the Royal Air Force. Then he would be able to withdraw his mobile elements from the front, create a reserve, and attack again. Grimly, the weary and filthy survivors of the Afrika Korps and 90th Light dug in. Mercifully they did not know what was in store for them, but one thing was clear: the glorious advance to the Nile was at an end.

Now that it was too late to achieve decisive results, Rommel was finally reinforced. Kesselring flew in more elements of the 164th Infantry Division from Crete to Tobruk, where they joined units already in Africa to form the 164th Light Afrika Division. In addition, the Luftwaffe began ferrying the 2nd Parachute Brigade across the Mediterranean, and the Italians contributed the Folgore Parachute Division and two infantry divisions—units released by the cancellation of the Malta invasion. To bolster his badly undermanned defenses, Rommel employed what for him was a new weapon: the land mine. He requested thousands from Berlin and dug up thousands more from the Galaza Line, Mersa Matruh, and Tobruk. Rommel's natural grasp of mine warfare was fantastic, and the mine soon became a major part of the Axis defensive line at El Alamein.

On the other side of the line, Auchinleck hastily rebuilt his units and brought up the 9th Australian and 8th Armoured Divisions. By August, 8th Army had 400 tanks, 500 guns, 7,000 vehicles, and 75,000 tons of supplies. Rommel's men, on the other hand, continued to live almost exclusively on supplies captured at the Gazala Line and at Tobruk.

During this brief lull, Auchinleck came up with a plan designed to destroy Panzer Army Afrika once and for all. He realized that the Italian divisions were used up, so he deliberately concentrated against them, forcing Rommel to use the Afrika Korps as a fire brigade, so it he would be too busy restoring his front and saving Italians to have no opportunity to launch a major offensive itself.

Auchinleck began his offensive on July 5, when the XIII Corps attacked Rommel's southern flank. This advance was checked in three days of fighting, after Rommel committed much of his depleted reserve. Then, on the 8th, Auchinleck struck Rommel's northern flank with a huge artillery bombardment (10,000 shells were fired), followed by an infantry attack, which was turned back by the 15th Panzer Division.

On July 10, Auckinleck struck again. Along the Coastal Road, the fresh 9th Australian Infantry Division attacked the Italian Sabratha Division, which melted away in minutes. The panzer army's tactical headquarters was only a few miles behind the Italian infantry. The senior officer present, Colonel von Mellenthin, recalled driving to the front and seeing

> [H]undreds of Italians streamed towards me in panic-stricken rout ... I immediately got in touch with [Panzer Army Afrika] Headquarters and scraped together everything I could in the way of staff personnel, flak, infantry, supply units, field kitchen companies ... and with these heterogeneous troops faced the Australian attack. In bitter hand-to-hand fighting, in which staff officers manned machine guns, we managed to halt the first enemy rush. [3]

At this most opportune moment, a new German unit, the 382nd Grenadier Regiment of the 164th Light Afrika Division, arrived on the battlefield. It had no vehicles, but marched straight into the combat and halted the Australian attack within 3,000 yards of panzer army headquarters. Unfortunately, most of the Wireless Intercept Service, including its commander, had been killed. ''The Tommies have netted two battalions of the Sabratha shits,'' Rommel reported, ''It ... makes you puke.''[4]

Auchinleck launched several more major attacks in July 1942. All were repulsed. The First Battle of El Alamein ended on July 27. The British 8th Army, which was shaken by the failure of 10 successive attacks, had lost 13,000 men, as opposed to 7,000 for Panzer Army Afrika (fewer than 1,500 of them German). It is ironic that Auchinleck stopped attacking when Rommel was on the verge of defeat. His artillery was out of ammunition and the few remaining panzers had only a few shells left. He had already decided to retreat to the frontier if the attacks were resumed.

BATTLE OF ALAM HALFA RIDGE

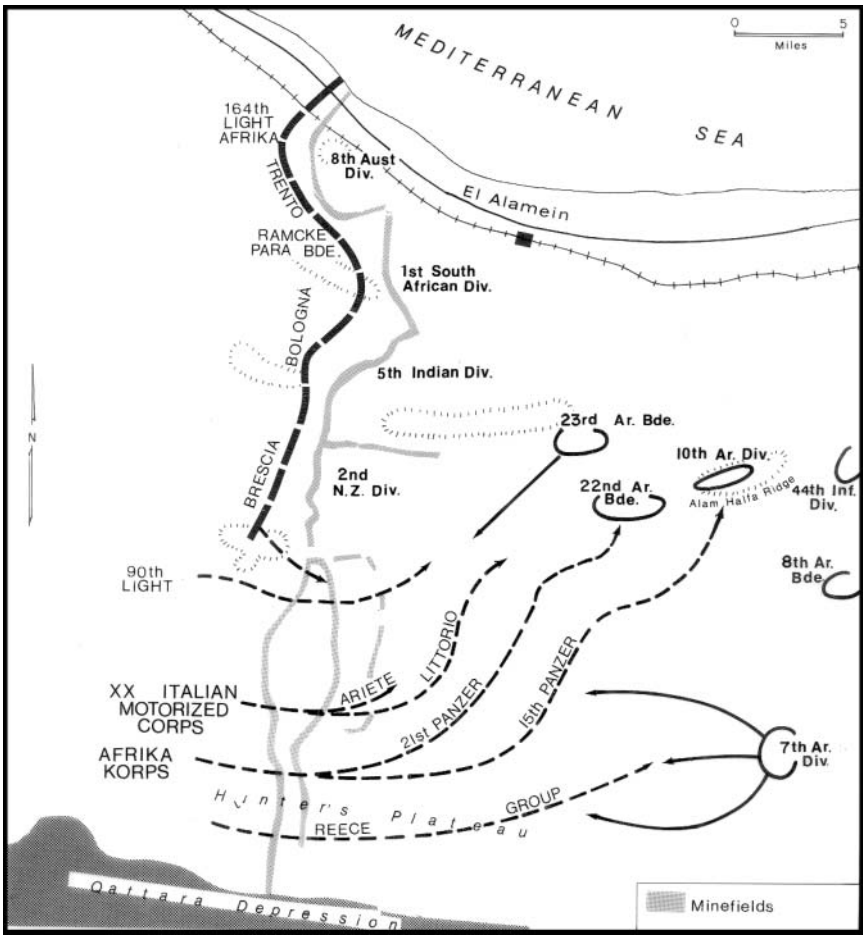
With the failure of Auchinleck's last attack, a lull descended on the North African Front. Churchill visited Egypt near the end of the month, relieved Sir Claude Auchinleck of his commands, and replaced him as commander-in-chief, Middle East, with General (later Field Marshal) Sir Harold Alexander. General Gott was named commander of 8th Army, but he was killed by a Luftwaffe fighter on July 26 and was replaced by General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery. General Sir Brian Horrocks succeeded Gott as the commander of the XIII Corps.

Meanwhile, the Allies won the supply war. In the central Mediterranean, they now had 250 British airplanes on Malta, and they (along with Malta-based submarines and surface vessels) were able to choke off Rommel's supply lines and defeat the II Air Corps' efforts to neutralize the island. In North Africa, Anglo-American naval forces unloaded 500,000 tons of supplies for 8th Army in the second half of August, as opposed to 13,000 tons for Rommel: a supply imbalance of 38 to 1. Rommel, therefore, decided to launch one, last, desperate effort to break through to the Nile. The Panzer Army General Staff informed Rommel that he would be outnumbered three to one in tank strength and five to one in aircraft when the battle started. Even the Desert Fox considered abandoning the offensive, but, on August 27, met with Cavallero and Kesselring and demanded a minimum fuel reserve of 6,000 tons. ''The outcome of the battle depends on the punctual delivery of this fuel,'' the Desert Fox declared, emphatically. ''You can start your battle, Field Marshal,'' Cavallero replied. ''The fuel is already on the way.''[5] The chief of the Italian High Command did, in fact, try his best to deliver the fuel by sending four tankers to Africa. The British sank all four. Rommel was nearly out of fuel and virtually defeated before the battle began.

Montgomery correctly assumed that Rommel would attack his southern flank, so he assembled an overwhelming force of 700 tanks in this sector. Rommel had only 259 panzers (most of them worn out) in his entire army. The Desert Fox waited until the last possible moment to attack, but the full moon that the engineers needed to breach the minefields was already on the wane, so he struck on August 30, despite the fact that he had not received his promised fuel. Figure 36.2 shows the Battle of Alma Halfa Ridge.

The attack was a nightmare. The DAK broke through the frontline of the XIII Corps quickly enough, but then ran into a dense minefield, which was covered by the 7th Armoured Division. As the Axis attack stalled in the open terrain, the Royal Air Force shot up the motorized columns and lit up the area with a new magnesium flare called the Christmas tree. The entire battlefield was soon as light as day. Among

Figure 36.2
The Battle of Alam Halfa Ridge



those killed were Major General Georg von Bismarck, who was personally leading the 21st Panzer Division forward when his tank was incinerated. General of Panzer Troops Walter Nehring, the commander of the Afrika Korps, was seriously wounded by a fighter-bomber. Colonel Fritz Bayerlein, Nehring's chief of staff, temporarily assumed command of the DAK. Major General Ulrich Kleeman, the commander of the 90th Light, was also seriously wounded. Rommel had lost three of his top four German commanders within three hours of the start of the offensive.

The Afrika Korps did not succeed in breaching the minefield until after dawn. Rommel struck his first blow at Alam Halfa that evening but was met by the entire British 44th Infantry Division (a fresh unit) and the 22nd Armoured Brigade, with dug-in tanks and heavy artillery support. One British tank squadron was wiped out, but Horrocks' line held.

The decisive attack came on September 1. The 21st Panzer Division was so low in fuel that it could not be used, so Rommel (who was now so sick that he could not get out of his cot most of the time) struck with only the 15th Panzer, which had only 70 operational tanks left. Horrocks met it with two infantry and two armored divisions, as well as much of the 8th Armoured Brigade—more than 400 tanks in all. Colonel Crasemann led his division up the face of the ridge, only to be taken in the flank by the 7th Armoured Division. A fierce but unequal tank battle ensued; meanwhile, British artillery fired round after round into German ranks, and the Royal Air Force fighters and fighter-bombers roamed all over the battlefield, striking again and again. In all, they dropped an estimated 1,300 tons of bombs on Axis positions from August 30 to September 4. By late afternoon the whole battlefield was littered with burning tanks and motorized vehicles—most of them German. The attack had failed; Erwin Rommel had suffered his ''Stalingrad of the Desert.''

Panzer Army Afrika began its retreat on September 1, but it was all too slow, because it was virtually out of fuel. The relay bombing continued for the next four nights, inflicting even heavier casualties on the Afrika Korps. Had Montgomery launched a major counteroffensive at this point, he might well have won a decisive victory, but he did not. The retreat finally ended on September 6. Rommel wrote, ''With the failure of this offensive, our last chance of gaining the Suez Canal had gone. We could now expect that the full production of British industry and, more important, the enormous potential of America ... would finally turn the tide against us.''[6]

It already had. Panzer Army Afrika was doomed.

DISASTER: THE SECOND BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

After his defeat at Alam Halfa Ridge, Rommel fell back and incorporated the captured Allied minefields into his own defensive network. He manned his frontline with six Italian infantry divisions, along with the 164th Light Afrika Division, which held his northern flank. Behind the front lay his mobile reserve and his best divisions: the 90th Light in the north, the 15th Panzer in the center, and the 21st Panzer to the south. The 90th Light was now commanded by Major General

Count Theodor von Sponeck; Major General Hans von Randow took charge of the 21st Panzer; and Lieutenant General Ritter Wilhelm von Thoma (a general of panzer troops as of November 1) succeeded Nehring as commander of the Afrika Korps. Vaerst, meanwhile, resumed command of the 15th Panzer Division, and General of Panzer Troops Georg Stumme arrived in Africa as Rommel's deputy commander. (Goering had persuaded Hitler to release Stumme and his former chief of staff, Colonel Gerhard Franz, who were in prison because of a security violation.) The Desert Fox then returned to Europe, to undergo liver and blood-pressure treatment at Semmering, a mountain resort in Austria, and Stumme assumed command of the panzer army.

General Stumme did what he could to prepare for Montgomery's offensive, but he was badly outnumbered in every category (see Table 36.1). Strawson called the Second Battle of El Alamein ''the antithesis of the blitzkrieg.''[7] Rommel called it ''a battle without hope.'' Montgomery began it at 9:40 P.M. on the night of October 23, when a massive artillery bombardment blasted a five-mile sector of the German lines. Fifteen artillery regiments—more than 1,200 guns—took part in the shelling. More than 500 of these guns had a caliber heavier than 105 millimeters. The density of guns was 240 guns per mile, or one cannon for every 7.3 yards of frontage. The main concentration was against Major General Carl-Hans Lungershausen's 164th Light Afrika Division, which endured five hours of uninterrupted fury. Entire units were buried alive; command posts were wiped out, communications were totally disrupted, and a large part of Rommel's minefields (called Devil's Gardens) were detonated prematurely by the concussion of the blasts. The attack had a particularly bad effect on the Italians, entire battalions of which fled to the rear in complete disarray.

Table 36.1
Strengths of Opposing Forces, Second Battle of El Alamein, October 1942

Category	Allies	Axis	German Only
Men	195,000	104,000	50,000
Tanks	1,029[a]	489	211[a]
Artillery	1,400[b]	475	200
Antitank Guns	1,403	744	444
Aircraft	750	675	275
Serviceable Aircraft	530	350	150

Note:
[a]Excluding light tanks
[b]Approximate total
Sources:
Kershaw, p. 42; Playfair and Molony, pp. 2–30.

At 1 A.M. on October 24, the Allied ground attack began. Montgomery's plan was to launch his major attack in the north. Lieutenant General Sir Oliver Leese's XXX Corps struck with five infantry divisions, supported by two armored brigades. Once they achieved the decisive breakthrough, Monty's plan called for the X Corps (Lieutenant General Herbert Lumsden) to exploit the situation with the 1st and 10th Armoured Divisions.[8] Meanwhile, to the south, Horrocks' XIII Corps would attack with three divisions and three brigades and pin down the forces on Stumme's right and center. This phase of Montgomery's battle plan, however, did not survive contact with the enemy.

Many of the South Africans and New Zealanders who led the advance on the northern flank did not expect to find a single German left alive. Instead, they ran into the remnants of the 125th Motorized Infantry Regiment of the 164th Light, which fought with unbelievable tenacity and turned back two full Allied divisions. South of the 125th, the 382nd Motorized Infantry Regiment checked the 9th Australian and 51st Highlander Divisions, but could not prevent a breakthrough when the Aussies found the gap created by the rout of the 62nd (Trento) Italian Infantry. Lungershausen and Major General Fritz Krause, the commander of Arko 104 (the 104th Artillery Command—the Panzer Army Artillery), however, had wisely ordered their artillery not to fire during Montgomery's initial bombardment; as a result, it had survived the barrage and now opened up on the Allied infantry with devastating effect. Finally, Lungershausen threw in his reserve (the 433rd Motorized Infantry Regiment) into the battle, halting the 9th Australian and 51st Highlander. Casualties had been heavy on both sides, but Montgomery had been denied his breakthrough—for the moment, at least.

Meanwhile, General Stumme followed the tradition of the German panzer commander and was leading from the front. En route to the headquarters of the 90th Light Division, he took a detour to observe the enemy's advance. Suddenly he came under machine gun fire. Colonel Andreas Buechting, the chief signal officer of the panzer army, was hit in the head and fell back into the staff car, mortally wounded. Stumme jumped on the running board of the car and ordered the driver to get out of there—an order which he obeyed with audacity. In the excitement, the driver did not notice that the general suffered a heart attack and fell off of the running board. For several hours no one knew what had happened to him. Lieutenant General von Thoma, the commander of the Afrika Korps, reported to Berlin that Stumme was missing in action and assumed command of the panzer army himself.

Montgomery's attacks, like blows from a sledgehammer, continued all night and into the daylight hours of October 24. The Italians south of the 164th Light were attacked by more than 100 American Grant and Sherman tanks. They panicked and fled to the rear, yelling ''Front

kaput, front kaput!'' Thoma restored the situation by launching a counterattack with the 8th Panzer Regiment, which forced the Allied armor back into a minefield, where 35 Shermans were destroyed. This setback did not deter Montgomery, however; he simply called for massive Royal Air Force airstrikes against the 8th Panzer and launched another attack on the southern flank. This one was turned back by the 21st Panzer and Ariete Divisions, Thoma's last reserves in that sector.

Monty's crumbling operations continued all afternoon on the 24th. Hitler personally telephoned the Desert Fox in Austria and asked him to start for Egypt immediately. Rommel took off from Wiener Neustadt a short time later. Aboard a Storch reconnaissance airplane, Rommel landed near his tactical headquarters at nightfall on October 25. Thoma met with him a few hours later and briefed him on the desperate situation. By now, Stumme's body had been found, Trento had been smashed, the 164th Light badly damaged, the Afrika Korps fuel was almost gone, and the 15th Panzer Division had only 3,294 men and 31 battleworthy tanks left. ''Rommel could do nothing,'' Colonel Bayerlein recalled. ''No major decisions which could alter the course of events were possible.''[9]

Despite the odds against him, Rommel checked every Allied attack for a week. At the end of October, Monty regrouped for another major offensive, which he appropriately codenamed ''Supercharge.'' He planned to have the Australians attack north for the Coastal Road during the night of October 30–31, in an effort to force Rommel to commit his reserves; then he would launch the main attack against Rommel's center, just west of Kidney Ridge. According to the plan, the 2nd New Zealand Division (supported by the 23rd Armoured Brigade and two British infantry brigades) would break through and would be followed by 400 British tanks at dawn on November 2. They would destroy whatever was left of the Afrika Korps.

The Australian attack began on the night of October 30–31. With generous artillery support, they broke through the remnants of the 125th Motorized Infantry Regiment and cut the Coastal Road. General von Thoma led an immediate counterattack with all available forces but could not reach the encircled regiment. The next day, Rommel personally scraped together a battle group, consisting of elements of the 21st Panzer and 90th Light Divisions, and broke through the Aussies, rescuing the gallant 125th. However, this move drew most of the German reserves into the northern sector, well away from Montgomery's intended point of attack—just as the British general had planned.

By this point, Rommel's men were almost out of ammunition and had only 90 operational panzers and 140 nearly useless Italian tanks left, as opposed to 800 operational tanks for the 8th Army.

The main attack began on both sides of Kidney Ridge on the night of November 1–2, and the fighting was savage. The northern prong broke

through the 15th Panzer Division, but was checked by elements of the 90th Light. To the south, Lumsden's X Corps overran a regiment of the Trieste Division and a battalion of German infantry. Colonel Wilhelm Teege's 8th Panzer Regiment lost 35 of its tanks—half of its total strength. British losses were also heavy. The 9th Armoured Brigade alone lost 70 of its 94 tanks, but Lumsden had torn a 4,000 yard hole in the German front. Rommel knew that he would have to close this gap, or the battle was lost.

On November 2, Ritter von Thoma launched two major attacks against the ''Supercharge'' forces, and again the fighting was desperate. ''The enemy fought with all the certain knowledge that all was at stake, and with all the skill of his long experience in armored fighting,'' Montgomery wrote later.[10] Both of Thoma's attacks were thrown back. Then 400 of Lumsden's tanks surged forward again. The 15th Panzer Division quickly rallied and made a last-ditch stand that has since been known as the Battle of Tel el Aqqaqir—one of the most desperate battles in the history of armored warfare. It was the death ride of the 8th Panzer Regiment. Willi Teege led his men forward into the counterattack with reckless abandon. Soon the battlefield was littered with burning British vehicles, but weight of numbers decided the battle in the end. All 35 of Teege's panzers were destroyed; the colonel died with his men. The elite 8th Panzer Regiment was effectively wiped out, and the 33rd Panzer Artillery Regiment lost all but seven of its guns. The once mighty 15th Panzer Division—half of the Afrika Korps—was thus reduced to a strength of zero tanks and seven guns.

Disaster overtook the panzer army all along the line. Shortly before noon, the Trieste and Littorio Divisions finally broke under the strain and headed for the rear. Rommel, who now had only 35 German tanks left, took the desperate step of throwing the Ariete Armored Division into battle against the Lees, Grants, and Shermans. ''The dead are lucky,'' Rommel wrote to wife.[11]

Montgomery did not attack on November 3, the day Rommel began his retreat from the Alamein line. For a time it looked as if he would be able to at least get his motorized formations back to Tripolitania, but, at 1 P.M., a message arrived from Fuehrer Headquarters. It commanded Rommel to—

> [S]tand fast, yield not a yard of ground, and throw every gun and every man into the battle.... It would not be the first time in history that a strong will has triumphed over bigger battalions. As to your troops, you can show them no other road than that to victory or death.[12]

Rommel was stunned. When he finished reading the dispatch, he simply sat down and stared blankly out the window. The sound of artillery fire was distinctly audible.

Rommel, for perhaps the first time in his life, did not know what to do. Finally he told Colonel Westphal: ''So far I have always insisted upon unqualified obedience from my men ... even if they do not understand my orders or consider them wrong. Personally I cannot depart from this principle and I must submit to it.''

''That means the end of the army,'' the chief of staff said.

''I am a soldier,'' Rommel answered.[13] Shortly thereafter he ordered his regiments to reoccupy their former positions and to hold them at all costs. He would live to regret this decision.

Hitler's order greatly affected the German soldiers, most of whom still believed in the Nazi dictator. ''At the Fuehrer's command they were ready to sacrifice themselves to the last man,'' Rommel wrote later.[14] The 164th Light beat back several Allied attacks on the northern flank, but a South African armored car regiment pushed through Rommel's broken center and into his rear, destroying transport and supply columns and generally spreading confusion and disorganization. They also cut the supply lines of the troops to the south, adding food and water shortages on top of everything else.

That night, Rommel agonized over his situation. Did he have the right to disobey his Supreme Commander or not? He sought out Major Elmar Warning of Westphal's staff and argued with himself. Warning, a tall, bald, bullet-headed man, was a good listener. Finally, Rommel declared, ''My men's lives come first! The Fuehrer is crazy.''[15] Even so, he signaled Rastenburg and requested that the order be rescinded. He was still awaiting a reply when daylight broke.

The first major Allied attack, which was spearheaded by 200 tanks, began at 8 A.M. Ritter von Thoma met it with 20 panzers; nevertheless, despite odds of 10 to 1, he turned it back. By now, the 8th Army had lost more than 500 tanks, or roughly three times the number lost by Rommel.[16] Montgomery, however, could afford the losses; Rommel could not. The British attacked again, and von Thoma made his last stand with Rommel's old *Kampfstaffel* (personal battle group–approximately 350 men) around a dune called Tel el Mampsra. He lost his last tank about noon. With his command virtually wiped out, he stood, tall and erect, beside a burning panzer, facing the enemy. Almost miraculously, he survived a hail of machine gun fire without being touched. Then the firing suddenly stopped, and several Shermans and a British jeep slowly approached his position. The general walked toward the jeep and got in without saying a word. That night, General von Thoma dined with Bernard Montgomery, who liked him and treated him with great courtesy. Thoma, in turn, invited Monty to visit him at his home in Bavaria after the war. This mutual admiration by two opposing soldiers was the subject of considerable criticism by the news media in England, the United States,

and Germany. It was not criticized in North Africa by either side. Churchill, however, commiserated with the German. ''Poor von Thoma!'' he declared. ''I, too, have dined with Montgomery.''

Of course, he was only joking. I think.

South of Tel el Mampsra, the Italian XX Motorized Corps resisted courageously, but its ''mobile coffins'' were no match for modern Allied tanks. By the evening of November 4, the Ariete and Littorio Armored and Trieste Motorized Divisions had been destroyed, except for a few rear-area units—all because of a senseless order issued by a Supreme Commander hundreds of miles away from the battlefield.

Erwin Rommel was filled with bitterness. That afternoon, he ordered a retreat to begin that night, in direct disobedience of the Fuehrer. Later, Hitler blamed a major on the staff of OKW for the disaster, stating this man had failed to awaken him and inform him of the true situation. The major, a scapegoat, was disgraced, broken to the rank of private, and sent to a labor battalion. He only barely escaped a firing squad.[17] Hitler, however, should never have issued the order in the first place, as the Desert Fox knew. For the first time, he was disappointed and disillusioned with the Fuehrer: a pregnant moment in the history of Nazi Germany. Meanwhile, the remnants of Panzer Army Afrika fell back to the west. After blowing up more than 40 tanks in the repair shops that they could not take with them, Rommel's army had only 12 tanks left. A dozen tanks in the whole army. A far cry from the proud legions that had so confidently smashed the Gazala Line, overrun Tobruk and invaded Egypt only four and a half months before.

NOTES

1. Carell, *Foxes*, pp. 238–39.
2. Mellenthin, p. 132.
3. Carell, *Foxes*, pp. 242–43.
4. Irving, *Trail*, p. 195.
5. Carell, *Foxes*, p. 247.
6. Rommel Papers, p. 287.
7. Strawson, *North Africa*, p. 132.
8. Lumsden also had the Headquarters, 8th Armoured Division under his command, but it had no subordinate troop regiments on October 23.
9. Young, *Rommel*, p. 136.
10. Ibid., p. 138.
11. Rommel Papers, p. 320; Carver, p. 173.
12. Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, p. 268.
13. Carell, *Foxes*, p. 295.
14. Rommel Papers, p. 322.

15. Irving, *Trail*, p. 233.
16. Carell, *Foxes*, p. 295.
17. Jodl's deputy, General Walter Warlimont, was relieved of his post in connection with this incident, only to be recalled two days later, when Hitler cooled off and General Schmundt intervened on his behalf. Jodl, on the other hand, did nothing for the man who had been his principal deputy for several years.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE HOLOCAUST CONTINUES

THE SECOND SWEEP

While Paulus pushed to the Volga and Rommel drove almost to the gates of Cairo, the Holocaust continued in the occupied territories and in the rear areas in the East.

As we have seen, the Einsatzgruppen completed their first sweep of the Jewish communities in the former Soviet regions in late 1941. The second sweep began almost simultaneously with the end of the first. Himmler, Heydrich, and others used considerably more men in the second sweep than the first, and the Einsatzgruppen were proportionally less important. Eventually they would be absorbed into the growing machinery of the Higher SS and HSSPf. They were reinforced by police regiments, army units (especially security divisions), and battalions of indigenous collaborators and auxiliary police battalions, which were called Schutzpolizei in the urban areas and Gendarmerie in the rural areas. They were also assisted by the military police (*Feldgendarmerie*), the secret field police (*Geheime Feldpolizei*), and the *Bandenkampfverbaende*: antipartisan formations under SS General Erich von dem Bach-Zelewsky, the former HSSPf leader whom Himmler named chief of Anti-Partisan Formations in early 1942. In all, more than 250,000 men were involved in the second sweep, but fewer than 15,000 were German.[1]

The Jews who had remained behind as the Soviets retreated tried to escape the Holocaust by working. By making themselves indispensable as laborers for the Wehrmacht or a private German firm, they reasoned, they would be spared the executioner's bullet. They did not realize that Himmler had already ruled that the Fuehrer's orders had priority over economic considerations: murder was more important than production.[2]

The second sweep was characterized by frenzied violence and sadism, and it was again far too public to suit Berlin. Operations focused on the Ukraine, where one town after another was fallen on by the murderers, who employed the same pattern. First, Jewish labor detachments were ordered to dig ditches, which looked suspiciously like mass graves. Second, the Jewish community or ghetto was surrounded or corridored off. This made the Jews nervous; they approached their German employers with requests to intervene. Jewish women and girls were often propositioned by the ''police'' (or propositioned them, in attempts to save their own lives). Normally they were used until dawn, then taken out and shot.

The actual ''action'' typically began at dawn, although night operations, conducted by searchlight, were not unusual. Jewish families, often only partially dressed, were hustled out of their homes at gunpoint and herded into a central assembly area. Many times the Jews tried to lock the assassins out, but their doors were knocked down or ripped open by crowbars. Many tried to hide in cellars, beneath the houses, or under beds. These tactics almost never worked: the executioners were too experienced. They lobbed hand grenades into the cellars and rolled them under the houses, which were often set on fire. Some Jews tried to run and were shot; the police had tracer bullets, which made their jobs easier. These Jews were then doused with gasoline and set on fire—even those who had only been wounded.

Meanwhile, trucks were driven to the assembly area, where the more passive Jews were collected by trucks. They were driven to the ditch and off-loaded, a process that was accompanied by blows from rifle butts or whips. They then had to strip naked and were subjected to body searches. Finally, they were lined up in or in front of the ditch and shot.

''The Jews submitted without resistance and without protest,'' Hilberg wrote. ''It was amazing how the Jews stepped into the graves, with only mutual condolences in order to strengthen their spirits,'' one German recalled.[3]

The executioners were usually drunk and occasionally a sadist would hit a pregnant woman in the stomach with his fist, and then throw her alive into the pit. Many wounded Jews remained in the ditch, on top of or under the dead, all night long. Some victims, naked and wounded, actually succeeded in escaping to neighboring towns, but most were soon captured and shot by the auxiliaries.

Operations in the Ukraine ended with the massacre of the Pinsk ghetto in November 1942, and the destruction of the Jewish community of Artemovsk on the Donetz, which was wiped out on November 22, 1942. An estimated 150,000 to 200,000 Jews were killed in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine alone. Professor Peter Seraphim of Goettingen

University reported to General Georg Thomas, the chief of the economics office at OKW, that there were still a few Jews alive in some of the larger Ukrainian cities, although they received no rations from official sources.[4]

By the beginning of 1943, the focus of operations had shifted to Reichskommissariat Ostland, where about 50,000 Jews were still at large. By the time all of the mobile killing operations were over, an estimated 1.4 million Jews had been murdered.[5]

THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS: RISE OF THE EXTERMINATION CAMP

The extermination camps had their roots in the Nazi concentration camp system, which began almost as soon as Hitler took power in 1933. Almost all of these were ''wildcat camps,'' run by the SA. By March 1934, most of these camps had been closed down and replaced by a handful of more permanent facilities, all of which were eventually taken over by the SS. The most prominent of these were Dachau and Oranienburg, near Munich and Berlin, respectively.

The first inspector general of concentration camps was Theodor Eicke. A major figure in the history of the SS, Charles Syndor described him as ''the architect, builder and director of the pre-war German concentration camp system.''[6] Eicke was born in Huedingen, in the then-German province of Alsace, on October 17, 1892, the eleventh child of a railroad stationmaster. He grew up in relative poverty, was a poor student, and dropped out of *Realschule* (high school) to enlist in the Rhineland-Palatinate 23rd Infantry Regiment in 1909. He was a member of the 22nd Bavarian Infantry Regiment in 1914, when World War I broke out. He took part in the Lorraine campaign of 1914, in the Ypres battles (1914–15), and in the trench warfare in Flanders (1914–16), serving at various times as a clerk, assistant paymaster, and frontline infantryman. In 1916, he was transferred to the 2nd Bavarian Foot Artillery Regiment, which suffered 50 percent casualties in the Battle of Verdun. From 1917 until the end of the war, he served in the II Corps' Reserve Machine Gun Company on the Western Front. He emerged from the war with the Iron Cross, First and Second Classes—high decorations for an enlisted man in the era of the Imperial Army.

When he returned to Germany after four years on the Western Front, Theodor Eicke was a violent and embittered man, and the revolutions filled him with hatred and disgust. He had no desire to serve in the ''new'' army of the Weimar Republic and, like Adolf Hitler and many others, he blamed the democrats, Communists, Leftists, Jews, and other ''November Criminals'' for the defeat of the Second Reich. To make matters worse, after 10 years of service, Eicke had no

education and no career prospects whatsoever. He moved to Ilmenau, Thuringia, where he enrolled in the technical school, but soon had to drop out due to a lack of funds (apparently he hoped for financial assistance from his father-in-law, but was disappointed). Unemployment was rampant in postwar Germany, and Eicke eventually became desperate enough to accept employment as a paid police informer, but he was fired in July 1920 for political agitation against the Weimar Republic. He had, however, developed a love for police work and, for the next three years, was employed in four cities. At least twice he was hired as a policeman, only to be fired for antigovernment activities. Finally, in January 1923, he became a security officer for the I. G. Farben corporation in the small Rhineland city of Ludwigshafen. Here his fierce nationalism and hatred for the Republic did not hinder him, and he remained with I. G. Farben until he became a full-time SS man in 1932. He joined the Nazi Party and the Stormtroopers in 1928 and transferred to the more elite and highly disciplined SS in 1930. In November of that year, Himmler appointed him second lieutenant and named him commander of the 147th SS Platoon (*Sturm*) in Ludwigshafen.

Eicke threw himself into his new party job with fanatical energy. He was so successful that Himmler promoted him to SS major in early 1931 and ordered him to recruit a second battalion for the 10th SS *Standarte* (regiment), then being formed in the Rhineland-Palatine. He was so successful that Himmler promoted him to SS colonel (*SS-Standartenfuehrer*) and named him commander of the 10th Standarte on November 15, 1931. Although a relative newcomer to the party, he was climbing rapidly indeed.

By 1932, the Nazis were making their big push for power, and Eicke had embarked on a career of political violence. This led to his arrest and conviction for illegal possession of high explosives and conspiracy to commit political assassination. Fortunately for him, Dr. Guertner, the Bavarian minister of justice, was a Nazi sympathizer. Guertner granted him a temporary parole for reasons of health in July 1932, but he promptly resumed his illegal activities, and the police were soon after him again. He was forced to flee to Italy in September, using a fake passport. To console him, Himmler promoted him to SS-Oberfuehrer and named him Commandant of the SA- and SS-Refugee Camp at Bozen-Gries, Italy, but he was not able to return to Germany until after Hitler became chancellor in 1933.

While Eicke was in exile, Joseph Buerckel, the Gauleiter of the Palatinate, decided to rid himself of the unstable SS man by having him replaced as commander of the 10th Standarte. Himmler, however, stood by him, and, when Eicke returned from Italy, he acted without restraint, as usual. On March 21, 1933, he and a group of his followers stormed the Ludwigshafen party headquarters and locked Buerckel—who now

held a post roughly equivalent to that of a U.S. governor—in a broom closet for more than two hours, before he could be rescued by the local police.

Once again Eicke had gone too far, and the humiliated Gauleiter extracted full revenge. He had Eicke arrested, declared mentally ill, and thrown into a psychiatric facility as a ''dangerous lunatic.''[7] Himmler was also furious at Eicke because this incident was a major embarrassment to the NSDAP (it must be remembered that the Nazis had not yet consolidated their power or established their dictatorship at this time). On April 3, 1933, the Reichsfuehrer-SS struck Eicke's name from the roles of the SS and approved his indefinite confinement to the mental institution. Finally humbled, Eicke managed to keep his fierce temper in check for several weeks and even succeeded in acting as if he were normal—a tremendous feat of acting. He wrote to Himmler several times and, with the help of a Wuerzburg psychiatrist, finally persuaded the former chicken farmer to have him released and restored to rank. It was out of the question, of course, for him to return to the Palatinate so, on June 26, 1934, SS-Oberfuehrer Eicke left the mental institution and went directly to his new assignment: commandant of Dachau, the first major German concentration camp for political prisoners.

Dachau, which was located about 12 miles northwest of Munich, was a mess from the Nazis' point of view in 1933. The original commandant was being prosecuted for the murder of several inmates, and the guards were corrupt, undisciplined, brutal, and prone to brag about their activities in public bars. Eicke soon discovered that the SS regional commander, Sepp Dietrich, had ''dumped'' his worst men (thieves, antisocial types, and so on) on Dachau. Eicke quickly dismissed or replaced about 60 out of 120 men and established the code of conduct that became the model for all concentration camps in the Third Reich. Undisciplined brutality was replaced by well-organized, disciplined brutality, based on the principle of unquestioned and absolute obedience to any and all orders from superior SS officers. Eicke subjected the inmates to close confinement, solitary confinement, beatings, and other corporal punishments, which usually amounted to 25 lashes with a whip in front of the assembled prisoners and the SS staff. The whippings were administered on a rotating basis by all officers, NCOs, and privates, and were designed to toughen them so that they could torture their prisoners impersonally, without remorse or conscience. The man administering the beatings was seldom the man who put the prisoner on report; he was simply beating him because it was his turn to do so. ''Under Eicke's experienced direction,'' Heinz Hoehne wrote later, ''anyone who still retained a shred of decency and humanity was very soon brutalized.''[8] He was particularly hard on his

Jewish prisoners, whom he hated most of all. (Eicke also hated Christians but treated them better than he did Jews.) Manvell and Fraenkel called him ''one of Himmler's most trusted adherents on racial matters.''[9] He had *Der Stuermer* displayed on bulletin boards in both the camp and in the barracks, personally delivered violently anti-Semitic speeches, and tried to incite hatred and anti-Semitism among the non-Jewish prisoners.

Himmler was so impressed by Eicke's ''success'' at Dachau that he promoted him to SS major general on January 30, 1934. Less than six months later, Eicke played a major role in planning the Night of the Long Knives and was selected by Himmler to personally execute Ernst Roehm—an order which he obeyed without question on the evening of July 1. Apparently Eicke was happy to carry out this order, because he shot Roehm and then taunted him as he lay dying. For his services during the Blood Purge, Eicke was appointed first inspector general of concentration camps and commander of SS guard units on July 5. Six days later he was promoted to *SS-Gruppenfuehrer* (SS lieutenant general). Eicke initially set up shop at the headquarters of the Gestapo at 7 Prince Albrecht Street, Berlin, and spread the rules that he had established at Dachau to the entire system. Later he moved his inspectorate to offices on Friedrichstrasse in Berlin and then adjacent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp at Oranienburg—which, along with Dachau, was the main camp in the embryonic system. In the summer of 1937, Eicke added the third major concentration camp at Buchenwald (near Weimar). Later he added the Gross-Rosen camp near Striegau, Silesia; Flossenburg, near Weiden, in the Upper Palatinate in Bavaria; and a women's camp at Ravensbruck in Mecklenburg. When Austria was annexed, the Mauthausen camp was established near Linz. ''By 1937,'' Snydor wrote, ''Eicke had a formidable reputation among his SS colleagues as a tough and vicious figure. Ever suspicious, quarrelsome, cruel, humorless, and afflicted with a cancerous ambition, Eicke was a genuinely fanatic Nazi who had embraced the movement's political and racial liturgy with the zeal of a late convert.''[10]

Once he had the new camp system fully operational, Eicke turned his attention to converting his SS Death's Head guard units (the *SS Totenkopfverbaende* or SS-TV) into Nazi Party paramilitary formations. His guards spent one week a month guarding prisoners and three weeks in military training, which involved rigorous physical exercise, maneuvers, weapons familiarization, and political indoctrination, aimed at making them insensitive and unquestioning political soldiers for the Fuehrer. In this aim he certainly succeeded. By 1943, the main SS-TV units had become the 3rd SS Panzer Division ''Totenkopf.''

Eicke had no tolerance for indolence or resistance to his orders, even among his own men. While his unit was on maneuvers, for example,

one SS man declared that he had not volunteered for military service when he joined the SS and demanded that he be returned to the concentration camp. Eicke promptly obliged and sent the man back—but as an inmate, not as a guard. There were no further protests.

In 1939, Eicke went to the field with his Death's Head units, never to return. He commanded an Einsatzgruppen in Poland in 1939, and led his division in France and on the Eastern Front, where he distinguished himself during the Demyansk battles (1941–42). He was killed in action in Russia on February 26, 1943.

Eicke was replaced as inspector general of concentration camps in 1939 by SS Lieutenant General Heinrich Gluecks, who held the post until the last weeks of the war, when he was replaced by Rudolf Hoess. It was subordinate to the SS Main Office for Economics, which grew into the SS Main Economic and Administrative Office (*Hauptamt Verwaltung und Wirtschaft*); known as the YWHA, it was headed by General of SS Oswald Pohl, a harsh disciplinarian well suited to run a bureaucracy of death. After an internal struggle of several years, he emerged as the dominant power in the concentration camp hierarchy.

Pohl's office divided the concentration camps into three classes. Class I camps were labor camps and were relatively mild. Although subordinate to them for administrative purposes, they were separate from the concentration camps proper, and the inmates were normally released after 6 to 12 weeks. Class II camps were harsher and had lower living standings and working conditions. Inmates seldom left Class III camps alive.

By 1939, there were about 100 camps of various types (including labor camps). They were inhabited by several major groups of people: criminals, political opponents, members of inferior races, and ''asocial'' elements (vagrants, clergymen, and so on) All prisoners wore zebra-striped uniforms, which were marked with serial numbers and colored triangles sewn to the left breast of their shirts and the right leg of their trousers. At Auschwitz, the prisoner's serial number was tattooed on his left forearm. The ones who had the worst lot were the homosexuals, who were characterized by pink triangles. Ostracized and despised by SS and other inmates alike, they were maltreated by the guards and shunned by the prisoners, who considered them moral scum. When the mass murders began, the homosexuals were among the first transferred to the death camps, because they were considered the most worthless caste. Almost none of them survived.

The yellow, six-pointed Star of David was worn by the Jews, as well as by ''race defilers''—that is, non-Jews who had violated the Nuremberg Laws. The race defiler's Star of David was outlined or surrounded by a black border. Foreigners had a letter imprinted on their triangles (''P'' for Poland, ''N'' for Netherlands, ''F'' for France, and so on). The

green triangles denoted criminals, red was the color used for political prisoners, Jehovah's Witnesses wore purple triangles, Gypsies wore brown, the ''shiftless'' wore black, and ''labor disciplinary prisoners'' wore a white A on their black triangles (A for *Arbeit* or work). Prisoners were identified by their color: greens, purples, reds, and so on. Members of penal companies had a black dot between the point of their triangles and their serial numbers. Feeble-minded prisoners wore an armband with the word *Bloed* (stupid) on it, and were often forced to wear a sign around their necks, stating ''I am a Moron!'' Prisoners who had tried or were suspected of trying to escape wore red-and-white targets sewn or painted on their backs and chests.[11] The implication was obvious.

The SS made no attempt to segregate the prisoners: quite the opposite, in fact. They wanted to degrade the political prisoners—the enemies of the regime—by placing them on an equal level with thugs, homosexuals, rapists, thieves, murderers, child molesters, and the rest of the scum of German society. They also mixed the prisoners to practice the age-old principle of ''divide and rule.'' In addition, the criminals made excellent informers.

From the beginning the camps were overcrowded. Buchenwald, for example, had 17 barracks, each of which was designed to accommodate a maximum of 500 prisoners. By early 1942, each barrack held 1,500 to 2,000 inmates.[12] The triple layer wooden bunks (which were ordinarily without mattresses or blankets) were designed for five inmates. They frequently held 15 or more. Sanitary conditions were indescribably poor. The camp's day began between 4 A.M. and 5 A.M. in the summer (or around 6 A.M. in the winter) by a whistle. The inmates were given 30 minutes to wash, dress, make their beds, and eat breakfast. This meal consisted of a piece of bread and a pint of thin soup or thin black coffee. Then came the morning roll call, which usually took an hour, until it was light enough to work. The work details marched off at the double time, singing, while the camp band played lively tunes, even if it was winter, when they were so cold they could barely feel their fingers.

Work day at the camps usually lasted 14 hours, from 6 A.M. to 8 P.M. or later, Sunday included. Sunday was a day the inmates almost always went without food, although they were still required to work. Six days a week, lunch was the only hot meal the prisoners received. It usually consisted of a thin soup which, like all of their meals, had little nutritional value. The last ordeal of the prisoners' day was evening roll call. It filled the inmates with terror. They had to stand in ranks for hours, often in rain or snow, while the SS established that no prisoners had escaped during the day. If there were 20,000 inmates and one were missing, the others were kept on their feet for hours, until he was

recaptured. Eugen Kogon, a Buchenwald inmate, recalled that two convicts once escaped from Buchenwald. All of the other prisoners were kept standing in ranks all night. By morning 25 of them were dead. By noon, the number had risen to 70. The health and strength of hundreds of others was seriously undermined by the experience. Naturally, the inmates were not allowed to eat or even break ranks throughout the ordeal. If they relieved themselves, they did so in their pants. And this was in 1938, months before the war broke out. Even when no one was missing, the roll call usually took at least an hour and a half.[13]

There were countless other harassments that the prisoners had to endure, such as morning calisthenics, pushups in the mud, standing on their heads in the snow, or crawling through puddles into which the guards had just urinated, but these varied from time to time, camp to camp, and barracks to barracks. At Dachau, the SS installed ''dog cells,'' where prisoners had to lie huddled together and were forced to bark for their food. Other prisoners were placed in unlighted cells without windows and kept there until they almost went blind. Master Sergeant Sommer of Buchenwald, a confederate of camp Commandant Karl Koch, was particularly notorious. He enjoyed torturing prisoners, especially by stripping them and alternately immersing their private parts in ice water and boiling water, and then painting the testicles with iodine. He beat prisoners to death for such infractions as reading the small strips of newspaper they were given for use in the toilet. He beat at least 100 Jews to death in 1940 and 1941 alone. Isle Koch, the wife of the Buchenwald commandant, was also fond of torture. Any prisoner who happened to glance up as she entered a room was subject to being reported for having ''stared shamelessly'' at the Commandant's wife. The best such an unfortunate could hope for was a quick death.[14]

Work in the camps usually meant armaments work, although up to 40 percent of all inmates were engaged in internal camp jobs, including carpenter work, barber, laundry, clothing and equipment room jobs, machine shop, supply distribution, prison hospital and post office work, maintenance, gardening, sewing, tailoring, lumber yard work, and latrine details. Other prisoners who had technical specialties made luxury items, including paintings, sculptures, and others. The quarry and gardening details were the most feared assignments. In the rock quarries, prisoners often collapsed under their burdens and drunken SS men would beat them or turn dogs loose on them. Death was common in the quarries. This made Mauthausen the most dangerous concentration camp, because it consisted predominantly of quarries.

As time passed and the German war effort required more and more slave labor, the number of subsidiary camps grew. The SS, of course, did not control all of the slave laborers or even the majority of them, but they did control tens of thousands of them. Buchenwald construction

detachments, for example, worked on the defenses of the Channel Islands. In 1944, Dachau had about 50 subsidiary camps, Auschwitz around 40, and Buchenwald more than 70. Sachsenhausen also had dozens. By renting out their prisoners to German business and industrial concerns, the SS was able collect 1.5 million Reichsmarks a month. Many of those on such details never returned. Conditions were incredibly bad at most of the subsidiary camps; food was poor and in short supply, and people were not able to change their clothes for six weeks at a time.

Punishment in the camps was severe and was administered for any number of minor and petty infractions, such as failing to salute, turning up one's coat collar in the rain, having a speck of dirt on one's shirt, or a ''sloppy posture.'' Sometimes they were punished for having mud on their shoes, even though the mud was almost knee deep; other times they would be punished for having their shoes shined too well—indicating to the SS men that they were shirking work. The punishments were highly varied. Perhaps the most common was the block. Prisoners, either men or women, were tied to a wooden rack, heads down and legs forward, exposing the buttocks. They were then struck 5 to 25 times with a cane, whip or horsewhip. Theoretically, this punishment could only be given after approval had been attained from Berlin. In practice, the prisoner was beaten immediately; then, about three weeks later, when approval came from Pohl's office, he or she was beaten again. After the beating, the prisoner was often required to do 50 to 150 deep knee bends.

Being hoisted up a tree was an even more painful punishment. The victim's hands were tied behind his back and then hoisted up by the arms, so that the entire weight of the body rested on the shoulder joints, resulting in severely dislocated shoulders or rotator cuff tears. Usually the SS would also beat the screaming prisoner in the face or the sexual organs. Inmates who lost consciousness were revived with cold water. The punishment lasted 30 minutes to four hours; permanent injuries were inevitable and many died. Even more begged for death before they were hoisted down.

Food in the camps was, of course, terrible. Even in 1937, the authorized cost of the food for prisoner per month was 55 pfenning—less than $7 per month. Much of this did not reach the prisoners because of SS corruption; prisoners detailed to the supply rooms and messes also got more than their share. Then, in August 1939, rationing was imposed on the German public, and the diet of the concentration camp inmate grew worse. Table 37.1 shows the weekly ration of a Class II concentration camp inmate from 1940 to 1945.

Under this ration, prisoners frequently lost 40 to 50 pounds or more in their first two or three months in the camps. Many long-time inmates weighed 125 pounds or less, and malnutrition was a major

Table 37.1
Weekly Rations for Inmates in Class II Concentration Camps

	Aug 40 to May 42 lb.oz.	May 42 to Apr 44 lb.oz.	Apr 44 to Feb 45 lb.oz.	March 1, 1945 lb.oz.
Meat and Processed meat[a]	14.1	9.9	7.0	8.7
Fat	7.0	6.0		
Margarine	5.2	4.5		
Lard	1.8	1.5		
Cottage cheese or skimmed milk cheese	1.6	1.6		
Bread	6.0	5.6	5.12	3.14
Sugar	2.8	2.8	2.8	
Marmalade	3.5	3.5	3.5	8.5
Cereals	5.1	5.1	8.8	
Flour or flour mixture	7.9	4.4	4.4	
Skimmed milk.			0.5 pints daily	0.5 pints daily
Coffee substitute	2.7	2.2	2.2	1.1
Potatoes	7.12	1.1	6.3	7.12
Fresh vegetables[b]	6.3	5.12	8.13	13.2
SUPPLEMENTARY DIET FOR HEAVY MANUAL WORKERS				
Meat and Processed meat[a]	14.1	9.9	9.9	13.3
Fat	3.5	3.5	3.5	1.9
Bread	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.7

Notes:
[a]Low-grade beef or horse meat. Reduced to 11 lbs., 2 oz. on October 1, 1941, and to 9 lbs., 9 oz. on January 1, 1942.
[b]Mainly turnips, turnip greens, and discarded cabbage leaves and stalks.
Source:
Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, pp.114–15.

contributing factor to epidemics and fatal diseases. The poor sanitation conditions and chronic shortage of water within the camps, however, seem to have been the major factors in many deaths. By the thousands, prisoners fell victim to typhus, typhoid fever, dysentery, scarlet fever, and other epidemics and diseases.

In late 1941, the SS Medical Branch started medical experiments at Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrueck, and Auschwitz, using prisoners as guinea pigs. To their shame, the Medical Science Corps of the Army and Luftwaffe also became involved in some of these experiments. These inhuman and sinister efforts did not advance medical science one step, but they did result in the deaths of thousands of prisoners, and included typhus, malaria, and altitude experiments.

In 1942, for example, Dr. Ernst Grawitz, the Reich Physician of the SS, had women inmates at Ravensbrueck infected with staphylococci, gas bacilli, tetanus bacilli, and other germ cultures to test the healing effects of certain drugs. Some of the women went untreated so the physicians could observe the course of the disease. Even for those who received treatment, it did no good, since the drugs did not work. Only a handful of the patients survived; the rest died in terrible agony. And there were at least half a dozen series in this one experiment. Another set of experiments involved warming people who had almost been frozen to death, while sterilization experiments were also conducted, as were yellow fever, smallpox, artificially induced abscesses, jaundice, diphtheria, poison gas, mustard gas, and other experiments on living human beings. There were experiments involving blood transfusions, using blood that had been stored too long; another involved deadly X-rays; another involved wounding Russian prisoners of war with poisoned bullets and then seeing if they could be saved. Muscle regeneration and bone transplants were also tried. Again, almost all of the ''donors'' died. Dr. Joseph Mengele, a physician at Auschwitz, involved himself in the study of twins, in an effort to help the German population grow more rapidly. Like all of the other inhuman medical experiments, this one led to dozens of deaths, but nothing in the way of scientific advancements.

Although Mengele has received the most publicity in recent years because he managed to escape human justice (it was finally determined that he drowned in South America in 1979), he was ''small fry'' in the SS medical hierarchy. After the war, a ''Doctors' Trial'' was held in Nuremberg before the American Military Tribunal. The verdicts were announced on August 20, 1947. Sixteen of the 23 defendants were pronounced guilty; seven were sentenced to death by hanging, five to life imprisonment, and four to prison terms ranging from 10 to 25 years. Those sentenced to death included SS Colonel Victor Brack, the chief administrative officer in the Reich Chancellery; SS Major General Dr. Karl Brandt, personal physician to Hitler and Reich Commissioner for Health and Sanitation; Professor Karl Gebhardt, Himmler's personal physician and president of the German Red Cross; and SS Colonel Wolfram Sievers, chief of the Institute for Military Scientific Research. General of Medical Services Dr. Siegfried Handloser, chief of Medical Services for the Armed Forces and Medical Inspector of the Army, received a life sentence, as did General of Medical Services Dr. Oskar Schroeder, the chief of Medical Services for the Luftwaffe.

Prior to the fall of 1938, the majority of the concentration camp occupants were not Jews; in fact, they made up only about 20 to 25 percent of all occupants before Crystal Night. After that, the proportion of Jews continued to increase until 1942, when the organized, assembly-line type of extermination campaign began.

CONCENTRATION AND FATEFUL DECISIONS

The Holocaust was not something Hitler and the Nazis had in mind when they took power in 1933; rather, it was an idea that evolved. In his masterpiece, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Raul Hilberg identified six subprocesses within the destruction process: (1) definition of who and who was not a Jew; (2) expropriation of Jewish property; (3) concentration of Jews in specific areas; (4) mobile killing (Einsatzgruppen) operations; (5) deportations; and (6) killing center (death camp) operations.[15]

After the Nazis defined who the Jews were, they expropriated the bulk of their property and, beginning in September 1941, forced the German Jews to wear Stars of David, to make them easily identifiable. In 1942, the Jews were ordered to paste the Star of David on their doors. In Poland, Heydrich and the SS employed the Einsatzgruppen for the first time in 1939. This phase was short-lived, however; the Einsatzgruppen did not come into their own until the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. More important, in the long run, Heydrich began the progress of concentrating Jews into specific areas in November 1939. He arranged to have the *Ostbahn*, entire railroad network of the General Government, placed at his disposal for the purpose of concentrating the Jews. They were ''resettled'' in ghettos that resembled something out of the Middle Ages. This process was an on again, off again affair. After two months (during which Heydrich had relocated 200,000 people), Hans Frank, the General Governor, became alarmed and began putting pressure on Himmler and Goering to have the shipments of Jews halted. Goering finally gave the stop order on March 23, 1940.

Frank could not prevent some ''dumping'' of Jews into his domain (largely from the Vienna area), although massive deportations did not begin until September 1941, after the Holocaust began. For these Jews, however, the Polish ghettos were merely way stations; they were only kept here until the construction of the death camps could be completed.

Except for the domiciles of a small percentage of Jews who cooperated with the Germans and helped administer and police the ghettos, these places were tremendously overcrowded areas of poverty, filth, and misery. The Warsaw ghetto, for example, featured 445,000 people crowded into 1.3 square miles and, in March 1941, had a population density of 7.2 persons per room.[16] This led to the rapid spread of epidemics, especially typhus. All of these Jews, of course, had been forced to leave behind virtually all of their valuables and property. They were compelled to work as forced manual laborers and were fed only the minimum amount of food necessary to stay alive; some did not get

even that. By the fall of 1941, the Jews were getting 33 ounces of bread per week (as opposed to 45 for Aryan Poles), 10 ounces of sugar per month, 3.5 ounces of marmalade per month, and less than two ounces of fat per month, excluding rare special food distributions.[17] In Warsaw, around 5,000 people per month were dying (mostly of malnutrition or the indirect effects thereof), and the first isolated cases of cannibalism were reported. Had it not been for such organizations as the American Joint Distribution Committee and others the death toll would certainly have been higher.

By the summer of 1941, when the Einsatzgruppen operations were already in full swing in the East, Heydrich received full authority to carry out the ''final solution.'' Under this plan, Jews from the Reich and points would be deported to the East to be exterminated. To oversee these operations, Heydrich selected a then-unknown SS major named Karl Adolf Eichmann.

Eichmann was the head of the small Jewish section (IV-B-4) of Heydrich's RSHA. Eichmann's immediate superiors were SS Gruppenfuehrer Heinrich Mueller, the head of Amt IV (the Gestapo); and SS Colonel Albert Hartl, chief of IV-B (Sects). Born in Solingen, Germany in March 1906, Eichmann had spent his formative years in Linz, Austria, the hometown of Adolf Hitler, where his father owned an electrical construction company. In secondary school, his history instructor was Dr. Leopold Poetsch, the same teacher who had so influenced young Hitler. Eichmann, however, wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and train as an electrical engineer. He was only able to complete two years of study, however, before his father's business failed in 1925, and Eichmann returned to an Austria characterized by inflation, widespread unemployment and economic stagnation. He managed to get a job as a traveling salesman for an electrical firm and later for Vacuum Oil A.G., but he was a very unhappy and disappointed young man. In 1931, he joined the Austrian Nazi Party and, two years later, fled to Germany, became a Storm Trooper, and joined the Austrian *Freikorps*, where he rose to the rank of sergeant.

Slender and somewhat shy—even affable—Eichmann seemed very much out of place with the Neanderthal Brownshirts. Except for an affinity for horseback riding, Eichmann was not a bit athletic and very much looked like what he was—a future bureaucrat. On the other hand, he had an undeniable talent for organization. He joined the SD in September 1934, was transferred from Bavaria to Berlin, and was ordered to put together a card index file on Freemasonry. Later placed in charge of the office museum, he became interested in Zionism and learned a little Yiddish and Hebrew. Here he was promoted to second lieutenant, but his first major career break came shortly after the Anschluss, when he was placed in charge of the Vienna Jewish emigration

office. He succeeded so well that he was promoted to captain and placed in charge of both the Central Emigration Office and the Jewish Section of the Gestapo (Section IV-A-4b of the Reich Main Security Office). In 1941, emigration turned to extermination. Eichmann's humble office at 116 Kurfurstenstrasse became the center of the destruction process, directing the deportation of the Jews to the east and coordinating mass murder. Eichmann himself worked largely behind the scenes. Only in 1944, during the massacre of the Hungarian Jews, did he enter the public limelight, and he never did rise above the rank of lieutenant colonel of SS.

The deportations of Jews from the Reich did not begin until mid-October 1941. Then 30,000 were deported to Minsk and Riga, where Eichmann expected they would be gassed. This plan miscarried, however. The Wehrmacht ordered that all Jewish deportation trains to Russia be stopped—not for humanitarian reasons, but because they needed the trains for the shipment of supplies and ammunition. This time Hitler backed the army, and the planned extermination camps at Riga and Minsk were never constructed. Many of the Jews sent to Riga were executed en masse by SS Colonel Rudolf Lange, the commander of the Gestapo and SD in Latvia, on November 29—the first mass murder of German Jews.[18] Almost all of the rest of this 30,000 eventually met their deaths at the hands of the Einsatzgruppen.

On January 20, 1942, one of the most important meetings in the history of the Holocaust was held at Gross Wannsee, in the office of the International Criminal Police Commission. Fourteen men were present, six of whom were SS: Heydrich, the chief of RSHA, was the chair. The other SS men were Heinrich Mueller and Adolf Eichmann of the Gestapo; SS Oberfuehrer Dr. Karl Schoengarth of the Gestapo in Poland; SS Colonel Dr. Rudolf Lange of the Gestapo's Latvian branch; and General of SS (*Obergruppenfuehrer*) Otto Hoffmann of the SS Race and Resettlement Office. The civilians present at the meeting included Gauleiter Dr. Alfred Meyer of Rosenburg's East Ministry and his assistant, Dr. Georg Leibbrandt; Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart, state secretary of the interior ministry; Erich Neumann, state secretary to the Office of the Four Year Plan; Dr. Roland Freisler, state secretary of the ministry of justice; Dr. Joseph Buehler, state secretary of Frank's General Government; Martin Luther, undersecretary of state in the foreign ministry; Gerhard Klopfer, State Secretary of the Party Chancellery, representing Bormann; and Ministerial Director Wilhelm Kritzinger of the Reich Chancellery.

Heydrich opened the meeting by announcing that he was the plenipotentiary for the preparation of the ''final solution'' of the Jewish problem. After reviewing the emigration statistics, he informed his listeners that, instead of emigration, the Fuehrer had now decided on a

policy of resettlement. The Jews would be formed into huge labor columns. Many of the Jews, he said, would ''fall away through natural decline.'' Those who survived this ''natural selection'' process would represent the hard core of Jewry and would have to be ''treated accordingly.'' Everyone present knew that he meant they would have to be killed. No one raised any objections except Martin Luther, and he did not object in principle. Speaking for the foreign office, he wanted the evacuation of Jews from Denmark and Norway postponed for the time being. He saw no problem in beginning the resettlement in the Balkans and Western Europe at once.[19] After a discussion of the treatment of Jews in mixed marriages and *Mischlinge* (people with both Jewish and ''Aryan'' grandparents), State Secretary Buehler urged that the implementation of the Final Solution begin immediately in the General Government. Everyone agreed to cooperate in the matter and everyone did. Even the residents of Theresienstadt, the model ghetto in Czechoslovakia (consisting of German Jews over 65 years of age and severely disabled Jewish war veterans or those holding the Iron Cross First Class or better) eventually ended up in the death camp at Auschwitz.

OPERATION REINHARD

As we have seen, Heinrich Himmler was not satisfied with the mass murders of the Einsatzgruppen for a number of reasons. First of all, progress was too slow. It addition, the shootings had to be conducted at hundreds of locations and it was thus impossible to keep them secret; it would be impossible to conduct such murders in western Europe. Finally, the cumulative psychological effect on his SS men was devastating. Another method of mass murder would thus have to be found. Fortunately—from Himmler's point of view—men with experience in other forms of mass murder were readily available in the Third Reich in 1941.

In September 1941, Artur Nebe, the commander of Einsatzgruppe B, carried out an experimental mass murder using explosives. Twenty-five mentally ill persons were locked inside two bunkers in a forest outside Minsk and blown up; however, it took two attempts and a great deal of trouble to finish them off, and the experiment was judged a failure.

A few days later, Nebe and Dr. Albert Widmann of the Criminal Police tried a poison gas experiment against 20 to 30 lunatics in Mogilev. Two pipes were driven into a wall, the victims were placed inside, and the rooms were hermetically closed. The exhausts of two cars were hooked up to the pipes, and carbon monoxide killed all of the prisoners within a few minutes. As a result, Nebe came up with the idea of

constructing a death van. Acting upon this recommendation, the Technical Department of the RSHA[20] developed two types of special vehicles designed for mass murder. The larger of these vans could gas 130 to 150 people, while 80 to 100 people could be exterminated in the smaller van. The entire gassing process took only 15 to 30 minutes, during which time the van was driven from the loading point to the grave site.[21] At this time, the highest concentration of Jews in Hitler's empire was in the General Government. This made occupied Poland the logical place to start the death camp (killing center) operations. The man Himmler placed in direct charge of the extermination program was SS Major General (*SS Brigadefuehrer*) Odilo Globocnik, the Higher SS and Police Leader for Lublin Province. A longtime Nazi and a veteran of the Austrian Freikorps movement in Carinthia, he was a self-indulgent drunkard who had been sent to prison in 1933 for his part in the murder of a Jewish jeweler in Vienna. A major conspirator during the Anschluss, he was rewarded by being named Gauleiter of Vienna in January 1939, but lost the post when he was caught engaging in illegal foreign currency transactions. After a period of disgrace, during which Globocnik was consigned to the ranks as an enlisted man, Himmler pardoned his friend and made him HSSPf Lublin in November 1939.[22] By 1940, Globocnik wanted to set up a ''Lublinland Reserve'' for Jews and Poles, who would be deported here from the Reich (or, more accurately, areas recently incorporated into the Reich). Himmler liked the idea and arranged for the transport of tens of thousands of Jews to the ghettos of the General Government, but Hitler carried the process to its ultimate extreme and, in the spring or early summer of 1941, ordered Himmler to begin the ''final solution'' process. Accordingly, it was Globocnik who set up the first permanent dead facility at Chelmno (Kulmhof) in the Warthegau, near the Warsaw-Posen-Berlin railroad line, using death vans sent to him by Nebe. Delays were caused due to jurisdictional disputes with Hans Frank, the Governor General, and his Landeskommissars, and the first murders at Chelmno did not take place until December 8, 1941. Chelmno, however, lacked the capacity of future death camps, and because its mass graves were reportedly causing a typhus epidemic, its operations were suspended in September 1942. In all, an estimated 66 transports left Lodz for Chelmno, carrying 55,000 victims.[23]

The Fuehrer Chancellery had been directly involved in the planning of the Holocaust since October 1941, when Victor Brack, the chief administrative officer of the Chancellery, offered to send his chemical expert to Riga, to select sites for death camps in Ostland. In December 1941, Brack ordered SS Captain Christian Wirth, a veteran of Hitler's ''mercy killing'' program, to go to Lublin to set up a new ''euthanasia institute'' under the direction of SS Major General Globocnik.[24]

(Between September 1939, and August 1941, the Fuehrer's euthanasia experts had put more than 70,000 people to death, before Hitler yielded to pressure from the religious right and ordered the mercy killings suspended. The project had been called T 4, because the organization's headquarters was located at 4 Tiergartenstrasse in Berlin; its director had been Reichsleiter Philipp Bouhler, Hitler's chief of Chancellery.)

In Poland, Wirth and his crew constructed gas chambers into which they piped carbon monoxide from diesel engines. They also employed mobile gas vans, but these were considered too slow and were seldom used after the Lodz ghetto was cleared in September 1942. Working with Globocnik, who was quite enthusiastic about his assignment, Wirth superseded SS Sergeant Joseph Oberhauser, another former euthanasia man, as commandant of the Belzec death camp in mid-December 1941.

Belzec was a small town in the southeastern part of the Lublin district, conveniently located on the Lublin-Lvov Railroad. Despite its small size (roughly 300 square yards), the camp itself had been a labor camp for thousands of Jews from January to autumn 1940, when it was closed. Now it was reopened and converted into a death camp. On March 16, 1942, they started the second permanent gas chambers at the Belzec camp. For the first time, the principles of the assembly line had been applied to the process of mass murder. The result would shock the world. Eleven days later, Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary:

> Beginning with Lublin, the Jews in the General Government are now being evacuated eastward. The procedure is a pretty barbaric one and not to be described here more definitely. Not much will remain of the Jews. On the whole it can be said that about 60 per cent of them will have to be liquidated whereas only about 40 per cent can be used for forced labor.
>
> The former Gauleiter of Vienna, who is to carry this measure through, is doing it with considerable circumspection and according to a method that does not attract too much attention. A judgment is being visited upon the Jews that, while barbaric, is fully deserved by them. The prophesy which the Fuehrer made about them for having brought on a new world war is beginning to come true in a most terrible manner. One must not be sentimental in these matters.[25]

Sentimental they were not. When Goebbels wrote these lines, another death camp was nearing completion at Sobibor. In mid-April, about 250 Jews were brought down from the Krychow labor camp and executed in a trial run. The experiment was successful, and soon the third of the death camps was opened. Even before this occurred, a special SS team was in the process of selecting a site for yet another extermination camp. By early May, they had found one—at Treblinka.

To exterminate the 2,284,000 Jews in the General Government (including the Warsaw, Krakow, Lublin, Lvov, and Radom districts),

Globocnik had 153 SS men and policemen from the Lublin district; 205 members of SS or police staffs or units from other districts; and 92 men from the T 4 program. The latter were most important, because they had experience in setting up and operating mass murder facilities. In fact, the connection between the euthanasia people and the Holocaust has never been fully investigated, but they set up and commanded the death camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. To support these camps, Globocnik set up a training camp at Trawniki. Its main purpose was to train Ukrainian volunteers to work in the camps and to serve as guards and executioners. Over the next two and a half years, 2,000 to 3,000 easterners (mainly Ukrainians) were trained at Trawniki. They formed the bulk of the men running the death camps. On average, only 20 to 35 German SS men were stationed at each camp. Each camp was normally commanded by an SS captain, with perhaps one lieutenant present as a deputy commandant. All of the other SS men were sergeants; there were no SS privates in the camps.

On May 27, Reinhard Heydrich was shot in Prague and died a few days later. Globocnik's extermination program was then officially renamed Operation Reinhard in his honor. By then the ''action'' was well under way, and construction had begun on Treblinka, the most efficient of the death camps under Globocnik's command. It was located on the Bug River, in the northeast section of the General Government, near Malkinia, a town on the main Warsaw-Bialystok railway and near the Malkinia-Siedlce railroad. The camp was surrounded by woods and naturally concealed. Although construction was directed by SS Lieutenant Colonel Richard Thomalla, an engineer, most of the work was done by Jews under SS supervision. The SS guards would sometimes amuse themselves by forcing Jews to stand under trees that were about to fall down. Several Jews were crushed to death in this manner, but all of the Jewish construction crews were murdered when construction was completed. The first Jews to be gassed at Treblinka were murdered on July 23, 1942, although the camp was only partially completed and construction continued for months. Another major death camp was eventually erected at Maidenek (Majdanek), about two miles from Lublin, but it was a Polish and Russian prisoner-of-war camp from 1939 to 1942, when it was converted into a concentration camp. It apparently was not used for mass murders until the summer of 1943 and never rivaled Auschwitz or Treblinka. The findings of a Russian court of inquiry—that 1.5 million people were gassed here—are, to quote Reitlinger, ''thoroughly suspect.''[26]

Even before Treblinka was operational, the forced deportations from the ghettos began. Lublin was cleared first, because Globocnik was HSSPf Lublin, and he wanted to get rid of all the Jews from his district as quickly as possible. Late on the evening of March 16, the Jewish

ghetto (which was already fenced off) was surrounded by Order Police and Ukrainian auxiliaries from Trawniki. The inhabitants were awakened by shouting and shooting, and were ordered to leave their apartments at once, or they would be shot. The Ukrainians were drunk and firing indiscriminately, causing panic among the Jews. Without regard for age or sex, they were lined up and marched under escort to the synagogue, where they were forced to wait until dawn. Then they were forced to march to the transfer station, where they were put on trains and shipped to the Belzec extermination camp.

The Lublin deportations continued for weeks. The SS men told the Jews that they were being sent to Russia as laborers, and the victims believed them. By the end of the summer, only a few Jews remained in Lublin. They were placed in a small ghetto in Majdan-Tatarsk. Later they were deported and murdered.

The deportations from the Warsaw ghetto began on July 22. Accompanied by several SS and government officials, SS Major Herman Hoefle arrived at the offices of the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) in Warsaw that morning and informed the chairman, Adam Czerniakow, that the Jews were to be resettled to the east. The Council was ordered to supply 6,000 Jews a day, beginning that very afternoon. The exceptions to the deportation order were the Jewish workers in the German factories with valid work permits, Judenrat employees, members of the Jewish Order Service (the ghetto police), members of the hospital staff, hospitalized patients, and the families of the exempt. The deportees were permitted to carry 15 kilograms (33 pounds) of luggage, food for three days, money, gold, and other valuables. Privately, Hoefle told Czerniakow that his wife was a hostage and would be shot if the ''action'' were impeded in any way.

Adam Czerniakow committed suicide the next day, but the evacuations continued for weeks. The SS cut off the food supply to the ghetto, but offered Jews who volunteered for resettlement six pounds of bread and a half a pound of marmalade per person. Many were so hungry that this tactic enjoyed some success.[27] According to SS Major General Juergen Stroop, 310,332 Warsaw Jews had been ''resettled'' as of October 3. At least 66 percent of these were sent to Treblinka in a 10-week period—perhaps as many as three-quarters. In all, according to Stroop, 500,000 Jews were killed in 10 weeks.[28]

Between 5,000 and 6,000 Jews left Warsaw each day, accompanied by brutal beatings. But what they found when they boarded the trains was worse than the beatings.

The deportation trains were run by the Directorate General of the Eastern Railroads (Gedob), an organization headed by Dr. Adolf Gerteis. It supervised and operated the expropriated Polish railroads under the *Reichsbahn*, the German railroad service, which was part of the

ministry of transportation. Gedob's employees included 9,000 Germans, 145,000 Poles, and a few thousand Ukrainians. It cooperated with the SS to the fullest extent.

The deportation trains were classified as ''special trains'' (*Sonderzuege*) and usually consisted of closed freight cars. Only on rare occasions did Jews travel in open cars. The freight cars were designed to carry cargo or cattle, not humans, but could have carried 60 to 70 people with a reasonable margin of comfort and safety. The SS and Ukrainian or Lithuanian guards packed each car with 150 Jews or more. As soon as they were inside, the Germans poured chlorine on top of them. ''Inside the freight cars it was so dense that it was impossible to move,'' Ada Lichtman recalled. ''There was not enough air, many people fainted, others became hysterical.''[29] At each stop they were robbed by their Ukrainian guards, who occasionally cut off fingers in order to steal rings.

Abraham Kszepicki, another survivor who was deported in July or early August 1942, recalled that more than 100 people were packed into his car. ''It is impossible to describe the tragic situation in our airless, closed freight car,'' he commented later. ''It was one big toilet. Everyone tried to push his way to a small air aperture.... The stink in the car was unbearable. People were defecating in all four corners.'' Everyone lay down and took off most or all of their clothes. At a stop, Kszepicki paid a Lithuanian volunteer 500 zlotys (more than half of his money) for a small cup of water. Many paid 1,000 zlotys. By 7 A.M. the next morning, the sun was already heating the car. ''People lay on the floor, gasping and shuddering as if feverish, their heads lolling, laboring to get some air into their lungs,'' Kszepicki recalled. ''Some were in complete despair and no longer moved.'' The trip to Treblinka took 20 hours, instead of the four or five it should have taken. ''If the trip had taken another half day, the number of dead would have been much higher. We would all have died of heat and asphyxiation.'' Often trains did take longer. Abraham Goldfarb later testified that 135 of the 150 people in his freight car died before it arrived in Treblinka in late August.[30]

When the Jews arrived at the death camps, they looked deceptively peaceful, as if they were really transit camps. There were no visible pits, graves, or gas chambers. The SS strengthened this impression by announcing that the Jews should undress; they were being sent to showers for cleaning and disinfecting, to prevent the spread of diseases and epidemics. Afterward they would receive clean clothes and be sent to work camps. The SS man making these announcements often wore a white coat, to give the impression that he was a physician. The Jews were then segregated by sex and the women were given haircuts, helping further convince them that they were going to the baths.

Everything was done at double time (that is, on the run), so that the victims would not have much time to observe and reflect; had they time to do so, they might have noticed something amiss and concluded that they were not really in a transit camp. Men were gassed first, before they could grasp what was really happening. The gas chambers themselves were camouflaged as showers; the deception was maintained until the door was shut and sealed. The Jews were also forced into the ''showers'' at the utmost speed by Ukrainian guards, who were equipped with whips, iron bars, and dogs. Women and children were killed last—they were much easier to murder. Death normally occurred within 15 to 30 minutes when carbon monoxide was used. To drown out the victims' screams, the SS arranged an orchestra. Elderly people and those who were unable to walk were told that they would be taken to an infirmary, where they would receive medical treatment. They were placed on carts (pulled by horses or Jewish men) and taken directly to the pits, where they were shot.

After the Jews were gassed, their bodies were dragged out and inspected. A dentist removed gold teeth and their finger rings were also removed, if they had not been taken already.

Jews did all of the physical labor at the camps. Out of each transit group, a few dozen young men were selected to remove the corpses from the gas chambers and bury them. They also collected and arranged the clothes and other goods left by the dead Jews. After working for a day or so, they were also murdered. Jewish carpenters, tailors, and other skilled workers (called *Hofjuden* or ''house Jews'') were allowed to live longer, but they also were also frequently gassed and replaced.

No doubt about it—the death camps were horribly efficient. About 75,000 Jews were murdered in Belzec during its first four weeks of operation. In just five weeks (July 23 to August 28, 1942), an estimated 312,500 Jews (mostly from the Warsaw ghetto) were gassed at Treblinka alone. By the time the first phase of Action Reinhard ended on October 28, 1942, approximately 40 percent of all the Jews in occupied Poland had been gassed with carbon monoxide. Hitler and Himmler were obviously quite pleased with Globocnik's ''progress.'' They promoted him to SS lieutenant general on November 9.

Hans Frank, the ruler of the General Government, had initially opposed the mass murders—not because of any humanitarian motivations, but because he did not want his rival Himmler encroaching on his empire. By mid-1942, however, it was clear to him that the Reichsfuehrer-SS had the full support of the Fuehrer in this matter, and that was all important. On June 3, therefore, he issued a directive transferring all Jewish affairs in the General Government to the SS and the Security Police. Sixteen days later, during a visit to Lublin, Himmler issued an order to complete the deportation of all Jews from the

General Government to the death camps by December 31, 1942. He quickly met opposition from Max Frauendorfer, the chief of the labor department of the General Government; Lieutenant General Max Schindler, the armaments inspector for Wehrkreis General Government; and General of Cavalry Baron Curt Ludwig von Gienanth, the military governor. According to Frauendorfer, the armaments industry of occupied Poland was ''entirely dependent on Jewish labor.''[31]

On September 18, General von Gienanth sent a memo to OKH, stating that slightly more than 1 million Polish industrial laborers were working for Germany. Of these, 300,000 were Jews, 100,000 of whom were skilled laborers. Poland was short of skilled laborers and the Jews were temporarily irreplaceable. In the enterprises essential to the Wehrmacht, Jews made up 25 percent to 100 percent of the workers. Virtually all of the workers in the textile industry were Jews, he said, and they were busy making winter clothing for the armed forces. He therefore asked that the removal of Jews from industry be postponed until they could be eliminated without significantly reducing industrial output. OKH forwarded the memo to Himmler.

The Reichsfuehrer-SS did not bother to respond to the Gienanth memo until October 9. In the meantime, the more Nazi-oriented General Zeitzler had replaced the conservative General Halder as chief of the General Staff, and (probably to further intimidate the generals) Himmler had used his influence at Fuehrer Headquarters to force Baron von Gienanth into retirement for the second and final time within two weeks of sending his memo.[32] In his reply, the Reichsfuehrer-SS basically rejected all of Gienanth's recommendations and made it clear that the Final Solution had priority over military considerations. He also stated that he had no sympathy for those who tried to shield or protect Jews under the disguise of military need and implied that he suspected von Gienanth of attempting to do just that. (To his credit, the old cavalry officer seems to have been doing exactly what Himmler accused him of.) In any case, that ended the matter. Gienanth was replaced by a more politically correct officer and Himmler met no further opposition from the Wehrkreis General Government. The Holocaust continued.

In August 1942, Odilo Globocnik appointed Christian Wirth inspector (commander) of all four death camps (Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka). He was succeeded as commandant of Belzec by SS Captain Gottlieb Hering.

Wirth was born in Oberbalzheim, Wuerttemberg, in November 1885. As an NCO in World War I, he distinguished himself in combat on the Western Front, where he was highly decorated. After the war, he joined the police and, by 1939, had attained the rank of criminal inspector in the Stuttgart police. At the end of that year, he was assigned

to the euthanasia program at the Grafeneck Psychiatric Clinic in Wuerttemberg; shortly thereafter, he was transferred to the euthanasia institution at Brandenburg an der Havel in Prussia. The medical director here was Dr. Irmfried Eberl, who became the first commandant of Treblinka in 1942. By mid-1940, Wirth had become a sort of roving inspector/director of the dozen or so euthanasia institutes located throughout the Third Reich. By mid-1941, he was active in the euthanasia program in western Poland.

Christian Wirth's character belied his name. He was brutal, inhumane, sadistic, and ruthless. He showed no remorse for the sick and insane he helped murder—in fact, he called them ''useless mouths.'' Jews he viewed as subhuman ''garbage'' and their lives had no meaning or value to him. He savagely beat both prisoners and his Ukrainian guards with his whip when they displeased him, and even his brutal guards were afraid of him. He was, however, infrequently seen by most prisoners; instead, he allowed his men—even the most perverted and sadistic—a free hand with them.[33]

The gassing system introduced by Wirth was only partially satisfactory, but he successfully resisted the introduction of Zyklon-B into his camps because this more efficient poison gas had been developed by his rival, Rudolf Hoess, the commandant of Auschwitz. Wirth concentrated instead on expanding his camp system and working it at maximum possible capacity. By the end of April 1943, there were 13 operational gas chambers at Treblinka, 763,000 Jews from the General Government had been murdered at Treblinka alone, and another 600,000 Polish Jews had been exterminated at Belzec. This camp, however, ceased its killing operations toward the end of December 1942, when the plan to deport 200,000 Romanian Jews fell through. Belzec was obsolete; after less than a year of operation, the SS already had more efficient death camps.

Like Wirth, most of the SS men in the death camps were brutal murderers or inhuman, robotic bureaucrats who considered murder just part of a day's work. They obeyed orders, and what those orders entailed did not concern them. Franz Stangl, the commandant of Treblinka, for example, had very little contact with his prisoners, whom he looked upon as cargo of which he had to dispose. Like Wirth, he gave his men free reign in dealing with Jews, which usually resulted in their deaths. Years later, under interrogation, he admitted he enjoyed his job. As incredible as it may seem, however, there was a small minority of humane SS men who surviving Jews spoke well of years after the event. Treblinka survivor Jacob Wiernik later wrote that SS 2nd Lieutenant Erwin Herman Lambert—

was humane and likeable. He ... was considerate to us. When he first entered the camp) and saw the piles of bodies that had been suffocated by gas, he was

stunned. He turned pale and a frightened look of suffering fell over his face.... With regard to us, the workers, he treated us very well. Frequently he would bring us food on the side from the German kitchen. In his eyes one could see his good-heartedness ... but he feared his friends. All of his deeds and movements expressed his gentle soul.[34]

Joe Siedlecki later testified that SS Sergeant Karl Ludwig ''was a good man. If I would meet him today, I would give him everything he might need. I cannot even count the times he brought me all kinds of things and helped me, or the number of people he saved.'' Another SS man, Sergeant Kliehr, who was in charge of the bakery at Sobibor, also managed to keep his decency, in spite of his uniform and his surroundings. When he was arrested and put on trial in Berlin in 1950, several surviving victims of the Holocaust flocked to his defense and testified on his behalf, and he was acquitted.[35]

These men, of course, were rare exceptions. Viciousness, sadism, rabid racism, and senseless hatred were the rule. The Ukrainians were particularly brutal. Ivan Demaniuk of Treblinka and his assistant, Nikolai, were especially infamous for their harshness. They supervised the gas chambers and worked on the motors that produced the carbon monoxide for the chambers. One survivor later testified that Demaniuk took special pleasure in hurting women. ''He stabbed the women's naked thighs and genitals with a sword before they entered the gas chambers and also raped young women and girls.'' He also cut off the noses or ears of Jews whose appearance he disliked. When a Jewish laborer's work did not please him, he often beat his skull in with an iron pipe. He especially enjoyed entwining people's heads between two strands of barbed wire; then he would beat them in the head. As the prisoner struggled, he would strangle himself on the wire.[36]

Another Jew recalled that most of the Ukrainian guards were little better.

Between Camp I and II were living quarters of the Ukrainians, who were always drunk. Everything they could get their hands on they stole from the camp and sold in exchange for vodka. They would pick out the prettiest Jewish girls, drag them to their rooms, rape them, and then lead their victims to the gas chambers.[37]

The Sobibor death camp was put out of business for several weeks in 1942 while repairs on the Lublin-Chelm Railroad were completed. Gassing resumed in early October, but at a slower pace. From the first of October until the beginning of May 1943, ''only'' 70,000 to 80,000 Jews were killed at Sobibor. Meanwhile, the focus of the murders shifted to the Bialystok District, an independent administrative unit under the authority of Erich Koch, the Gauleiter of East Prussia and

Reichskommissar of the Ukraine. The Einsatzgruppen had already killed 31,000 Jews (mostly men) in the Bialystok area between July and September 1941, but then the mass murders had been suspended. By autumn 1942, there were approximately 210,000 Jews in the district, largely concentrated in the Bialystok and Grodno ghettos.

On October 15, 1942, the deportations from Bialystok to Treblinka began, while other trains were sent to Auschwitz. These ghetto-clearing operations were brought to an abrupt halt in early December due to a lack of trains. They were all working overtime for the Wehrmacht, which was in the middle of the Stalingrad crisis. On January 23, 1943, Himmler made a personal appeal to Dr. Theodor Ganzenmueller, the state secretary for transportation, to make trains available for the Final Solution. Whether out of Nazi political conviction or fear of the Reichsfuehrer-SS, Ganzenmueller relented and supplied the trains. Once again the needs of the Final Solution took precedence over the needs of the military. By February 19, more than 110,000 Bialystok Jews had been murdered at Treblinka alone.

In the summer of 1943, the army and German civil authorities in Bialystok appealed that the Jews there were vital to the war effort. Himmler again rejected this argument and sent Globocnik to Bialystok to personally coordinate the final solution of the ghetto. In spite of resistance from the Jewish underground, the Bialystok ghetto was liquidated on August 18 and 19, 1943. Meanwhile, on June 21, Himmler ordered the liquidation of the Ostland ghettos, including Riga, Minsk, Vilna, Kovno, Shavli, and Lida. Most of the Jews who had lived there were already dead or gone. The Jewish population of Minsk, for example, was now only about 7,000. It had been 75,000 in June 1941. The Jewish population of Vilna fell from 57,000 to 11,500 over the same period.

The Ostland ghettos were exterminated in the fall of 1943, while another 135,000 Jews were sent to the Reinhard death camps from Germany, the Protectorate, Holland, France, Greece, and Yugoslavia. Himmler, however, had already decided to close Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka and bring Operation Reinhard to an end. The reason was simple: they were no longer needed. The annihilation of the Polish Jewry was virtually an accomplished fact, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau death mill had increased its killing capacity by constructing more and larger gas chambers and crematoria, and it was now able to meet all of the demands of the Nazi extermination system. In addition, Himmler was now interested in erasing the evidence of his crimes. In March 1942, he delegated this task to SS Colonel Paul Blobel, the former leader of Einsatzkommando 4a, who had carried out the mass murders at Kiev in 1941. His formal appointment was made by ''Gestapo'' Mueller in June 1942. Blobel's job was top secret and went by the

codename ''Sonderaktion 1005''; his unit was called Commando 1005. He was ordered not to put anything in writing.

Blobel carried out his first experiments at Chelmno, using incendiary bombs. They did not work well and set the neighboring woods on fire. He then tried cremation by placing the bodies on wood in open piles. The remaining skeletons were deposed of by a special bone-crushing machine, and the ashes were dumped back in the pits. This simple but effective method was soon tried at Sobibor, where the buried corpses had swelled and caused the mass graves to push above the surrounding terrain, resulting in a terrible stench, massive vermin infestations, and the danger of contamination of the drinking water. Although it took months, Blobel's crews cleaned up Sobibor. As a result of this success, crematoriums were added to all of the death camps and most of the concentration camps.

The Jews initially met the Holocaust with an understandable sense of disbelief. After they heard about the Einsatzgruppen and the rumors of death camps, many of them worked hard for the Wehrmacht, in an effort to make themselves indispensable. They logically deducted that they would be safe if they were badly needed by the German war effort. Their would-be murderers, however, did not think logically. The Jews did not realize that Himmler had already ruled that the Final Solution was more important than the Wehrmacht's war effort. This information was not common knowledge, of course, and the facts dawned on the Jews only slowly. Gradually, however, there were more and more incidents of individual escapes from the trains; acts of spontaneous resistance began to take place, the frequency of which increased with the passage of time, as more and more Jews heard about what was really happening in the camps. The first spontaneous revolt reportedly took place at Belzec on June 13, 1942. A group of Jews who had been sent to remove the corpses of murdered women and children were so revolted by the horrible sight that they threw themselves at the throats of their surprised guards. They killed four to six guards with their bare hands before they were subdued. They were all put to death.[38]

On August 2, 1943, the first uprising occurred at Treblinka. About 750 prisoners took part; 100 refused to do so. The hundred who made no effort to resist were nevertheless summarily executed by the SS the next day. Of the 750 Jews who turned on their tormentors, about half were shot in the camp and killed on or near the fences. During the night of August 2–3, about 200 prisoners were caught and shot, leaving 150 to 200 at large. They received little help from the Polish population, which was largely indifferent to their fate. Most of them did not survive the war. No more than 70 Treblinka inmates were still alive when Berlin fell.

On October 14, another uprising took place at Sobibor. About 700 tried to break out and another 150 refused to make the attempt. All 150 who ''played it safe'' were shot the next day. Between 230 and 270 prisoners were killed inside the camp or on the fences and in the minefields which surrounded the camp. Three hundred prisoners escaped the compound, but 100 of these were soon captured and shot. Of the 200 who escaped, only between 50 and 70 survived the war.

The Treblinka and Sobibor Uprisings shook Heinrich Himmler, who decided to act quickly, before the spirit of Sobibor could spread. He ordered General of SS Friedrich Krueger, the HSSPf Warsaw, to liquidate the remaining labor camps at once. Krueger delegated this task to SS Lieutenant General Jacob Sporrenberg, who had just replaced Odilo Globocnik as HSSPf Lublin.

The ''action'' took place on November 3. About 15,000 Jews, including women and children, were put to death in the Poniatowa labor camp. The Jewish underground group tried to resist but was trapped in the barracks and burned to death. After the fighting ended, wounded Jews were thrown into the burning barracks.

The Trawniki labor camp was also liquidated, at the cost of 8,000 to 10,000 Jewish lives. Another 18,000 Jews were murdered at Majdanek. All totaled, about 42,000 Jews were killed in the action, which was known as Operation *Erntefest* (Harvest Festival).

The Belzec death camp, meanwhile, was closed at the end of July, and the workers transferred to Sobibor. Some realized what that really meant and resisted but were quickly shot. The last camp commandant, SS Captain Hering, became commander of the Poniatowa labor camp.

Treblinka received its last major shipment of human cargo—25,000 Bialystok Jews—at the end of August, when the last large-scale murders took place. In September, in spite of charges of corruption that seemed to have been well founded, Globocnik was sent to Italy as Higher SS and Police Leader, Trieste—which must have been a prized appointment for him, since Trieste was his home town. His transfer was partially due to his strained relationship with Hans Frank. He was soon followed by most of the Reinhard staff, including Wirth, Stangl, Hering, and others. Treblinka was blown up and abandoned in November 1943.

Sobibor, the last of Reinhard death camps, was closed in late November 1943, and its Jewish workers were murdered. It was converted to a depot for captured ammunition under Oswald Pohl's SS Main Economic and Administrative Office. Operation Reinhard was finally over. Yitzhak Arad, who wrote perhaps the best book on the subject, called it the ''largest single massacre action of the Holocaust'' and estimated that 1.7 million Jews had been murdered.[39] But the Holocaust was not over—it had merely shifted its focus elsewhere.

So had the war.

NOTES

1. Hilberg, pp. 243–44.
2. Koch, *Aspects*, pp. 379–80.
3. Hilberg, pp. 248–49.
4. Reitlinger, p. 239.
5. Hilberg, p. 256.
6. Charles W. Snydor, Jr., *Soldiers of Destruction* (1977), p. 3 (hereafter cited as Syndor).
7. Heinz Hoehne, *The Order of the Death's Head*, Richard Berry, trans. (1971), p. 228 (hereafter cited as Hoehne).
8. Kogon, pp. 106–7; Hoehne, p. 229. Among Eicke's guards at this time were Adolf Eichmann, Rudolf Hoess, the future commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp, and Helmut Becker, the future commander of the Death's Head SS Panzer Division.
9. Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *Himmler* (1965; reprint ed., 1968), p. 45.
10. Snydor, pp. 22–23.
11. Kogon, pp. 35–36.
12. Ibid., p. 48.
13. Ibid., pp. 79–80.
14. Kogon, pp. 233–26.
15. Hilberg, p. 39.
16. Ibid., p. 152.
17. Reitlinger, p. 61.
18. SS Colonel Rudolf Lange was directly responsible for the murder of 70,000 to 100,000 Jews during World War II. He was apparently killed in action near Posen (Poznan) on February 23, 1945, although at least one source states that he committed suicide.
19. Hilberg, pp. 264–65.
20. SS Lieutenant Colonel Walter Rauff was the head of the RSHA's Technical Department.
21. In the summer of 1941, Himmler asked SS Lieutenant General Dr. Ernst Grawitz, the chief of the Medical Services Branch of the SS, what was the best way to conduct mass killings. Grawitz suggested the use of gas chambers.
22. Globocnik was directly subordinate to Himmler for Operation Reinhard; otherwise he was subordinate to the HSSPf Warsaw, Friedrich Krueger.
23. Reitlinger, pp. 246–48.
24. Ibid., pp. 246–47.
25. Goebbels Diaries, March 27, 1942.
26. Reitlinger, p. 295.
27. Kogon, p. 193
28. Reitlinger, pp. 262–64.
29. Yitzhak Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps* (1987), p. 63 (hereafter cited as Arad).
30. Ibid., p. 379.
31. Ibid., p. 46.

32. Baron von Gienanth was born in Eisenberg, Upper Bavaria, in 1876. He entered the service as a Fahnenjunker in 1896 and was commissioned into the 23rd Dragoons the following year. He underwent General Staff training from 1904 to 1908 and served in General Staff positions during World War I, mainly with cavalry divisions. He was chief of staff to the German Military Mission to Constantinople in 1918. During the Reichswehr era he alternated between cavalry and General Staff positions, and ended up as commander of the 3rd Cavalry Division (1929–31) and 4th Infantry Division (1931–33). He retired in 1933 as an honorary general of cavalry but was recalled to active duty in 1936. He was commander of Frontier Guard Command Breslau when World War II began. This headquarters later became the XXXIV Corps Command. He briefly served as OB East before becoming military governor of the General Government in 1940. After Himmler forced him into retirement, Gienanth settled in Heidelberg. He died in 1961 (Keilig, pp. 106–7).
33. Arad, pp. 163–64.
34. Ibid., p. 196.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., p. 197.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., p. 257.
39. Ibid.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE BATTLE OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC, 1941–42

THE U-BOAT WAR: SPRING 1941

At the beginning of 1941, optimism was high at OKM and in Admiral Doenitz's headquarters, and the possibility of defeating the United Kingdom seemed real. In January 1941, the U-boats sank almost 100,000 tons of Allied shipping, and in February sank more than 200,000 tons (42 ships). In January 1941, British imports amounted to less than half their totals for January 1940. With the Luftwaffe now sinking almost 100,000 tons of shipping per month, the OKM estimated that their combined forces would soon be capable of sinking 750,000 tons per month—enough to knock Britain out of the war if they could maintain it for a year. British losses already totaled 400,000 tons per month (according to OKM estimates), and they were only capable of building 200,000 tons of shipping per month; therefore, barring a fundamental change in the situation, the defeat of Britain could be predicted with mathematical certainty.[1]

At the beginning of March, Convoy OB-293 sailed outbound from Liverpool to Halifax and reached a position well south of Iceland. On the evening of March 6, it was intercepted by *U-47*, under the command of Guenther Prien, the famous ''Bull of Scapa Flow.'' Prien immediately attacked the convoy, and Doenitz, from his headquarters at Kerneval, a chateau near Lorrient, dispatched several submarines to the area. The U-boats sank two merchantmen and damaged two others, but their own losses were disastrous.

The British escort vessels were directed by Commander James Rowland, the commander of the old World War I destroyer *Wolverine*. First,

he depth-charged and severely damaged *UA-45*. Its commander, Lieutenant Commander Hans Eckermann, was able to pull it out of the battle in the general confusion and successfully nursed it back to Lorrient, but others were not so lucky. *U-70* under Lieutenant Commander Joachim Matz was driven to the surface by the corvettes *Camellia* and *Arbutus*. Matz set off demolition charges in the hull and gave the order to abandon ship. Even *U-99,* under ''Silent Otto'' Kretschmer, was driven off before it could fire half of its torpedoes. But the redoubtable Prien persisted in the attack. He sank his 28th merchantman but, at dusk on March 8, depth charges blew Germany's most famous U-boat apart. There were no survivors.

U-boat losses continued to mount. On March 15, Convoy HX-112, with more than 50 heavily loaded merchant ships, came under attack, and a 10,000-ton tanker erupted in a huge explosion.

The escorts for HX-112 were controlled by Commander Donald Macintyre and included his own destroyer, the *Walker*, four other destroyers, and two corvettes. During the daylight hours of March 16, the escorts and U-boats maneuvered against each other but without effect. Then, at 10 P.M., another merchant ship erupted. Within the next 60 minutes, the convoy was rocked by four more explosions. Macintyre was near despair, when suddenly he saw a tell-tale white line in the water: the wake of a U-boat. The *Walker* immediately gave chase and forced the submarine to dive. Macintyre pounded the area with depth charges for a half an hour but did not know for sure whether his target had eluded him until the convoy again came under attack from the determined U-boat commander. The *Walker* and the *Vanoc* now teamed up and launched more depth-charge attacks; then, suddenly, the *Vanoc* broke contact and headed into the darkness at full speed. She rammed the surfaced submarine, *U-100*, crushing its commander, Joachim Schepke, to death on the conning tower and sinking the U-boat. There were only five survivors.

U-100 had been ''sighted'' by a new type of radar that allowed its operators to detect a surfaced submarine at night, well beyond the range of the human eye. It was a turning point in the Battle of the North Atlantic, because, with asdic (sonar) and radar working in tandem, escorts could now move in on U-boats whether they were submerged or surfaced. The Battle of Convoy HX-11Z was not over, however. The *Walker*'s asdic operator was sure he had detected another U-boat, so the destroyer fired another spread of seven depth charges, forcing *U-99* to the surface, where it was blasted by the guns of the *Walker* and *Vanoc*. The submarine signaled that it was sinking, and one by one the crewmen jumped into the water. All but three survived. The last of the half-frozen men to be pulled into the Walker wore the distinctive, white captain's cap. He was Lieutenant Commander Otto

Kretschmer, a holder of the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and the top U-boat ace of World War II, despite the fact that he would spend the last four years of the conflict in a prison camp. He had sunk 44 ships, totaling 266,629 tons.[2]

Within the next few days, two more U-boats were destroyed. These heavy losses led an alarmed Admiral Doenitz to order his submarines further out to sea, in case the British had developed new anti-submarine devices. He could now deploy up to 19 submarines in the Atlantic at the same time (the highest total since September 1939), and in March 1941, the Allies lost 206,000 tons of shipping to U-boats. But spring brought no relief. British losses in April totaled 232,000 tons and May was worse. Doenitz put more than 20 U-boats to sea and shifted the focus of his offensive to the South Atlantic, mostly off Freetown on the West African coast. Freetown was the assembly point for shipping from South America, south Africa, and India. The U-boats sank 66 ships in May alone.

The losses of the British tankers created serious fuel shortages in the United Kingdom. The average Briton's mileage ration was now only 35 miles per week, but the government projected the country would need to have an additional 100 million gallons a year. As a result, industrial allocations were arbitrarily cut 10 percent, and rations for farmers and fishermen were reduced.

Despite these successes, the mood of optimism at OKM faded in May. The Luftwaffe left for Barbarossa, which was a major factor in the Battle of the Atlantic. The loss of the *Bismarck* also ended the day of the surface raider, and the glory days of the auxiliary surface raider were clearly over. From here on, the U-boats would have to face the Royal Navy alone. In addition, the British continued to win the technology war. Their ability to use radar and sonar in tandem certainly increased the vulnerability of the U-boat. This development was followed by the perfection of the shipborne, high-frequency direction finder, which was called the ''Huff-Duff.'' This invention enabled British operators to tune into high-frequency coded messages from Doenitz to his captains. If two operators picked up the same signal, they could cross-reference and obtain the approximate location of the submarine. As the tracking teams received more practice and became more skillful, they were able to obtain a remarkably accurate picture of U-boat dispositions.

In May 1941, the Royal Navy scored another major victory when it captured *U-110* off the coast of Greenland. In it, they found an intact German electronic coding machine. The ULTRA crypto-analysts used the captured device to break ''Hydra''—the U-boat code, as well as its successor, ''Triton.'' From mid-1941 on, the British were able to decipher many of Doenitz's most secret dispatches.

Another major British victory was won in one of the backrooms of the Admiralty in London, where Operational Research, a little-known office, analyzed data on sinkings by U-boat and determined that the number of vessels lost per convoy was a function of the number of attacking submarines and the number of escort vessels available. The number of merchant ships in the convoy, they concluded, had little to do with it. As a result, the Admiralty increased the size of a typical convoy from about 30 to 60 ships or more. This meant that more escort vessels could be assigned to each convoy, and there would be fewer convoys for the U-boats to ambush.

The increasing size of the Canadian Navy was another contributing factor to the growing Allied control of the seas. When the war broke out, it had only six destroyers, five minesweepers, and a few auxiliary vessels, and a total strength of only 3,000 men. Prime Minister Mackenzie King, however, launched an ambitious ship construction program, and, by 1941, Canada was ready to take full responsibility for guarding the western leg of the Atlantic convoy run. By the end of the war, the Canadian Navy would have 400 ships and 90,000 men at sea.[3]

Finally, the British began to use the airplane as an anti-submarine weapon—a development that would ultimately seal the fate of the Wolf Packs. Although the Royal Air Force used airplanes against the U-boats from the beginning, the British were slow to employ its full potential against the German submarines. Airborne anti-submarine weapons were initially poor and British naval air tactics were too aggressive. Instead of overflying the convoys and coordinating their operations with those of the ships, they flew independent patrol missions, looking for U-boats. They thus spent by far the majority of their flight time on wide sweeps over empty ocean. Even when they spotted a U-boat, it was usually able to crash-dive and escape. Forcing a submarine not engaged in an attack against a convoy to dive was an insignificant incident. If the same U-boat had been on the verge of firing its torpedoes into a merchant ship, forcing it into a crash-dive would have been an important event.

British naval air tactics did not begin to improve until the spring of 1941, when operational control of Coastal Command was turned over to the Royal Navy. About the same time, Coastal Command was given about 30 American-built Catalina flying boats, which could stay airborne from 17 to 25 hours at a time. With the addition of long-range fighters and bases in Iceland, only 400 miles of ocean in the mid-Atlantic were beyond the range of protective aircraft. In addition, early airborne radar known as the ASV (air-to-surface vessel) became available in 1941. This radar had one serious drawback: it lost contact with the submarine if the airplane came too close to it (that is, if it came within a mile of it). At night, therefore, submarines could escape, until

the British began attaching a powerful searchlight to each airplane. This searchlight was perfected and reaching the squadrons by August 1941. Then the British developed the tactic of making long-range contact by radar and cutting their engines, so they could glide silently toward their target; then, by cutting on their searchlight at the last minute, they were usually able to take the submarine by surprise and sink it with their improved airborne depth charges.

In the summer of 1941, the Royal Navy introduced yet another antisubmarine innovation: the Catapult Aircraft Merchantman (CAM). These ships were equipped with Hurricane fighters that could be launched by catapults, thus giving their convoys aerial protection. The CAM ship was the forerunner of an even more formidable opponent: the small escort carrier. The first of these were converted freighters or passenger ships on top of which a flight deck had been superimposed. Later, better designed escort carriers were built from scratch. Each could carry several airplanes and, when they and the new, faster escorts joined the convoys in sufficient numbers, the doom of the U-boat was sealed.

THE U-BOAT WAR, SUMMER AND FALL 1941

While British defenses grew notably stronger, so did Doenitz's forces. In June 1941, the construction yards delivered 25 U-boats in a month for the first time. Between June and the end of August, the submariners sank 96 ships (447,000 tons). This brought the total Allied shipping loss from all causes to 7,459,000 tons (one-third of Britain's prewar tonnage). Of this, 818 ships, totaling 4,034,000 tons (or 54 percent) had been sunk by U-boats. Aircraft accounted for 433 ships (1,369,000 tons).[4]

Meanwhile, the unneutral acts of the Americans made them an unofficial co-belligerent in the Battle of the Atlantic. On September 1, 1941, Admiral Ernest King, the chief of Naval Operations, ordered U.S. naval forces to convoy merchant ships in the Atlantic—a clear violation of international law. Berlin protested the decision but without success. Grand Admiral Raeder urged Hitler to lift restrictions on attacks within the American neutrality zone, but Hitler refused to do so, recalling that submarine warfare was the main reason the United States entered World War I on the side of the Allies. Nevertheless, King's convoy orders put the U.S. Navy on a collision course with the U-boats, and it was only a matter of time before a major incident occurred. It took place on October 31, when the U.S. destroyer *Reuben James*, which was escorting Convoy HX 156, turned to investigate a suspicious direction-finding bearing. As it did so, it cut in front of Erich Topp's *U-552*,

which fired a torpedo into her side. It must have struck the forward magazine, judging from the violence of the explosion, which blew away the entire forward part of the ship. The vessel sank within five minutes. As it went under, its depth charges detonated, killing several men in the water. Of the 160 man crew, only 45 survived. All of the officers were killed. Four destroyers quickly sailed to the scene, but the skillful Topp made good his escape. The incident outraged American opinion and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered a speech in which he called the U-boats ''the rattlesnakes of the sea.'' He ''forgot'' to mention that the *Reuben James* was escorting a British convoy and was engaged in a depth-charge run against a U-boat when it was struck. In any event, the incident and the speech brought the U.S. considerably closer to war.

Despite the new American escorts, September 1941, was another good month for the U-boats. Total British losses that month were 54 ships (208,822 tons). Even more disturbing to London was the fact that 40 of the sunken ships had been traveling in convoy.

THE SECOND ''HAPPY TIME''

October and November 1941 were not good months for the U-boats. Some of Doenitz's best commanders were now in the Mediterranean (on Hitler's orders), where British defenses were excellent, and total Allied losses were 31 ships in October (151,000 tons) and 12 ships in November (62,000 tons). ''[I]t was almost as though death had declared a holiday in the North Atlantic,'' Edwin P. Hoyt wrote later.[5]

The holiday ended on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked the American Pacific Fleet base at Pearl Harbor. The following day, Grand Admiral Raeder told Doenitz that Hitler had rescinded his restrictions on sinking American shipping; however, due to the fact that the Germans had less prior warning about the Pearl Harbor attack than did the Americans, Doenitz was not prepared to do anything about it.

On December 8, Doenitz had 91 U-boats in his fleet, but the standard Type VII U-boat was not suitable to make the long voyage to the United States. Only the 740-ton Type IX C could stay out six full weeks, which would give it a combat patrol of about two weeks off the American coast. It would be the third week of December before the first Type IX C was ready to make the two-week trip to American waters, but Doenitz wanted a more concentrated effort. This was not achieved until the first week in January 1942, when he had 16 U-boats en route to Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean to begin the next phase of the war. Doenitz called it Operation *Paukenschlag* (Drum Beat).

The United States was utterly unprepared to participate in the Battle of the North Atlantic, but only Rear Admiral Adolphus Andrews, the commander of the Eastern Sea Frontier, seemed worried. Since December 7, he had gathered a strange collection of 20 ships and 100 obsolete airplanes to guard a coastline of 1,500 miles. Most of his ships were tugs, yachts, and fishing boats that could not even mount a depth-charge apparatus. Not one of his ships had enough firepower to challenge the four-inch deck gun found on each U-boat. Admiral Andrews appealed to Admiral King for help. King sent him a handful of minelayers, but, in general, ignored his appeal.

The first attack came on January 12, 1942, when Lieutenant Reinhard Hardegen in *U-123* torpedoed the British passenger steamer Cyclops (9,000 tons) 300 miles off the coast of Cape Cod. The next day, Commander Ernst Kals in *U-130* sank two steamers in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Hardegen scored again on January 14, when he sank the tanker *Norness* 60 miles off of Montauk Point, Long Island. The next day he sank the tanker *Coimbra*, followed on the 17th by the steamer *San Jose*. On January 18, Commander Richard Zapp (*U-66*) sank the tanker *Allan Jackson*, and the following day Lieutenant Hardegen sank three more ships (including the tanker *Malay*) and damaged a fourth with his last torpedo. Kals ''beat the drum'' again on January 21, when he sank the tanker *Alexander Hoegh* south of Cape Breton. Hardegen, meanwhile, surfaced and sank the 3,000-ton freighter *Culebra* with his deck gun. He then returned to Lorient and told Admiral Doenitz that he should rush submarines and minelayers to U.S. waters to take advantage of the unprepared Americans.

Kals, meanwhile, sank six ships (four of them tankers) on his first American patrol and damaged a fifth tanker with his deck gun. After sinking the *Allan Jackson*, Commander Zapp sank another tanker and three freighters. Lieutenant Heinrich Bleichrodt followed and sank three freighters and the Canadian tanker *Montrolite* (11,000 tons), and Lieutenant Ulrich Folker (*U-125*) sank a steamer and damaged the tanker *Olney*. All totaled, the first five U-boats to enter American waters sank more than 150,000 tons of shipping, including several vital tankers. From a loss of 23 ships (102,000 tons) in December 1941, Allied losses jumped to 50 ships (288,000 tons) in January 1942.

Admiral Andrews attempted to confuse the next wave of U-boats by rerouting the shipping lanes, but it did not work: *U-106* (Lieutenant Hermann Rasch) sank five ships, *U-103* (Lieutenant Commander Werner Winter) downed four, and *U-107* (Lieutenant Harald Gelhaus) accounted for three. Andrews still did not have enough ships to provide escorts for even two convoys, so the carnage continued. Only one U-boat was sunk in the Atlantic in January, and it was destroyed by a British ship. Losses were not strictly limited to American waters,

however. Erich Topp and Lieutenant Johannes Oesterman (*U-552* and *U-754*, respectively) sank four ships in the Gulf of St. Lawrence area, and Captain Wolfgang Lueth in *U-43* sank four ships (21,307 tons) in three days of the Irish coast.[6] Meanwhile, Doenitz discovered that Type VII U-boats could operate briefly off of the U.S. coast if they were stripped of amenities and given additional fuel. At the end of January 1942, however, Hitler's intuition acted up again, and he ordered that all U-boats be stationed off of the coast of Norway, to meet an anticipated Allied invasion. Doenitz managed to get him to reduce the number to eight, which left him 20 operational U-boats for the North Atlantic.

Admiral King was extremely slow—almost criminally slow—in providing Admiral Andrews with warships to serve as convoy escorts. As of March, he only had two destroyers *on loan*, at a time when the U.S. Atlantic Fleet alone had 73 destroyers available. With the greatest diplomacy, the British advised their American cousins that the solution to their losses was the convoy system, but their advice and long experience in anti-submarine warfare was lost on Admiral King, who hated the British intensely. He ignored their suggestions. Of the 50 Allied ships sunk in January, only two were traveling in convoy. Still King refused to adopt the convoy system. American politicians were also of no help, as usual. When Admiral Andrews recommended that a blackout be imposed on the cities along the Atlantic coast, he reaped a storm of protest and criticism, especially from Miami and Atlantic City. The lights of the cities continued to burn brightly, clearly outlining the silhouettes of unescorted ships for the eager U-boat commanders. As a result, in February, Doenitz's captains, supplemented by a few Italian submarines, sank 71 ships—384,000 tons of shipping—including 23 of the vital tankers.

Typically, Admiral King tried to shift the blame for the losses to the British and accused the Royal Air Force of making insufficient efforts to destroy the U-boat bases along the Bay of Biscay. With superhuman diplomacy, Churchill swallowed this insult and ordered the Bomber Command to attack Doenitz's bases. During the past year, however, the Todt Organization had been building remarkable ''U-boat pens'' at Lorient, La Pallice, and other harbors. Earlier, the Royal Navy had suggested that the pens be destroyed while they were being constructed, but Bomber Command resisted the idea; now that they were finished, it was too late. Their walls and roofs were made of reinforced concrete and were 20-feet thick. Over the next three years, British and American bombers would drop hundreds of tons of bombs on the submarine pens, but to no avail: they were completely bombproof. They continued to provide shelter for the submariners until they were physically occupied by American infantrymen in 1944.

Meanwhile, the Axis submarine aces continued to sink American ships. Lieutenant Hardegen made another foray in March, sank seven more ships, and damaged three. Lieutenant Ernst Bauer also sank seven ships and damaged three more. Commander Feeia di Cossato, captain of the Italian submarine *Tazzoli*, sank six ships in March. By now, too many oil slicks and dead bodies had washed up on American beaches, and so many surviving sailors had reported that their ships had been silhouetted by lights from cities, that Lieutenant General Hugh Drum, the commander of the U.S. Army's Eastern Defense Command, ordered a blackout. In the meantime, Franklin D. Roosevelt had finally gotten enough of Admiral King's stubbornness, so he summoned the naval chief to the White House and ordered him to adopt the convoy system. On March 16, King relayed the order to his subordinates but only furnished Andrews with three destroyers. Andrews was thus forced to convoy without escorts, which defeated the purpose of having a convoy in the first place.

On March 17, five U.S. tankers and several merchant ships steamed up the American Atlantic coast. That night, near Cape Hatteras, they were ambushed by Lieutenant Commander Johann Mohr in *U-124*, who quickly torpedoed and sank four of them. By now, Admiral Andrews was virtually begging King for help, and the U.S. Petroleum Industry War Council estimated that the United States would be out of oil in six months unless something were done to improve the situation. Still Admiral King refused to give Andrews any more destroyers.

In March 1942, the U-boats sank 79 ships. The amount of tonnage sunk in American waters exceeded that of January and February combined. Allied shipping losses in the first quarter of the year totaled an astonishing 1.2 million tons—and half of the losses were tankers. Things did not get any better during the first week of April, when seven more tankers were sent to the bottom of the sea. The situation was gradually improving, however. The first British anti-submarine trawlers arrived in U.S. waters that week, finally giving Admiral Andrews a reasonably effective anti-submarine weapon. Most important, however, was the fact that the Americans finally adopted the convoy system in April—and these convoys were closely escorted by destroyers and patrol vessels and covered by airplanes. As a result of these measures, shipping losses off the American coast fell to 400,000 tons in April—100,000 less than the previous month. This figure is somewhat deceiving, however, because the overwhelming majority of the losses occurred in the first two weeks of the month. After the armed convoy system was adopted, shipping losses off of the U.S. coast fell dramatically.

Not only were American losses down—they were beginning to attack the U-boats with effectiveness. In June and July, Doenitz lost

three U-boats to American escorts. This represented one-third of the U-boats operating between Halifax and Cape Hatteras. As a result, Doenitz shifted the focus of his operations to the Caribbean, where the Allies still did not have enough escorts to adopt the convoy system. Doenitz's strategic and operational concepts remained the same: the key to naval victory lay in tonnage sunk, no matter where. This could best be accomplished by finding ''soft spots,'' where Allied merchant ships sailed unescorted or without air cover. This pattern would continue until Allied skill and technology eliminated *all* of the soft spots and finally defused the U-boat threat.

NOTES

1. Porten, pp. 175–76.
2. Kretschmer later became an admiral in the West German Navy.
3. Barrie Pitt and the editors of Time-Life Books, *The Battle of the Atlantic* (1980), p. 125 (hereafter cited as Pitt et al.).
4. Hoyt, *U-Boat Wars*, pp. 120–21.
5. Ibid., p. 132.
6. Juergen Rohwer, *Axis Submarine Successes, 1939–1945* (1983), pp. 74–75.

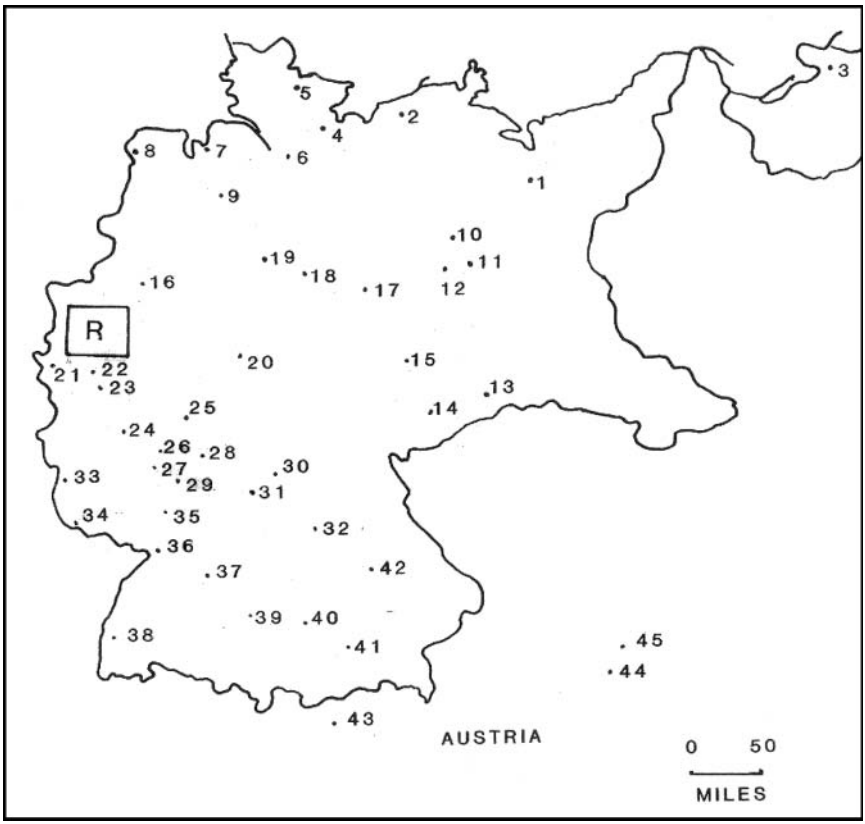
CHAPTER XXXIX

THE BOMBINGS BEGIN, 1942

While the bulk of the Luftwaffe was engaged on the Russian Front, the Royal Air Force recovered from the Battle of Britain. It began to bomb Germany in earnest in the fall of 1941, but it lacked the strength to make a real dent in the German war economy. British bomber losses were also high. In August 1941, it lost 107 airplanes in 18 nights. It lost another 153 in September and 108 more in October. Despite these losses, the British raids were of little more than nuisance value. Frequently, the British bombers missed their target cities altogether. There were actually cases in which the German civilians came out into the streets to watch the free fireworks displays, as the Royal Air Force dropped bombs all over the countryside. From October to December 1941, almost half of the British bombs dropped against Germany fell on open ground and another 17 percent struck dummy installations.[1]

Five events fundamentally changed the air war in the West. First, the Americans entered the war and supplied Bomber Command with Lockhead Venturas and Douglas Bostons, allowing them to replace the obsolete and disliked Bristol Blenheims. Second, British industry began to manufacture Avro Lancasters, which replaced the twin-engine Manchesters and Handley Page Halifaxes. Third, the British developed ''Gee''—a navigation system that used radio pulses from three transmitting stations to guide bombers to their targets at night. Fourth, the Royal Air Force abandoned the concept of pinpoint bombing in favor of area bombing. Finally, on February 20, 1942, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris replaced Air Marshal Sir Richard Peirse as commander-in-chief of Bomber Command. ''Bomber'' Harris was a tough, blunt, and uncompromising advocate of strategic bombing. His stated objective was to create a large bomber force and to pulverize the cities of

Figure 39.1
German Cities, 1942



Germany until German morale collapsed and the Third Reich capitulated. His first target was Luebeck, which Harris chose because it was ''built more like a fire-lighter than a human habitation.''[2] Its wooden buildings were built close together, especially in the *Altstadt*, the medieval center of the town. Also, the city was known to be lightly defended.

On the night of March 28–29, 1942, 234 airplanes from Bomber Command dropped 144 tons of HE and 160 tons of incendiaries on the town. In 90 minutes, 320 people were killed and 791 were wounded, and some 200 acres of buildings were destroyed—about half of the old city. In the suburbs, another 2,000 homes were destroyed or damaged beyond repair.[3] ''The British have completely destroyed Luebeck,'' one woman wrote to her brother, a private on the Eastern Front. She

GERMAN CITIES, 1942

1. Stettin
2. Rostock
3. Koenigsberg
4. Luebeck
5. Kiel
6. Hamburg
7. Bremerhaven
8. Wilhelmshaven
9. Bremen
10. Oranienburg
11. Berlin
12. Potsdam
13. Dresden
14. Chemnitz
15. Leipzig
16. Muenster
17. Magdeburg
18. Brunswick
19. Hanover
20. Kassel
21. Aachen
22. Cologne
23. Bonn
24. Koblenz (Coblenz)
25. Gieseen
26. Wiesbaden
27. Mainz
28. Frankfurt/Main
29. Darmstad
30. Schweinfurt
31. Wursburg
32. Nuremberg
33. Trier
34. Saarbruecken
35. Mannheim
36. Karlsruhe
37. Stuttgart
38. Freiburg
39. Ulm
40. Augsburg
41. Munich
42. Regensburg
43. Innsbruck
44. Wiener-Neustadt
45. Vienna

R. The Ruhr (including Essen, Bochum, Geisenkirchen, Dortmund, Oberhausen, Wuppertal, Elberfeld, Duesseldorf and others)

informed him that she had evacuated their parents to another city and added, ''We are lucky to still be alive. I simply can't tell you how it all happened. Everywhere there was groaning and moaning.... The whole city was one mass of flame. There is not a single street left in Luebeck, no water, no light, no gas. Everybody is grief-stricken.''[4]

Harris lost only a dozen bombers in the attack. Figure 39.1 shows the location of Luebeck and most of the other major cities that were subjected to major aerial bombardments in 1942, 1943, 1944, and 1945.

The raid on Luebeck was followed by raids against the Baltic Sea port of Rostock on four consecutive nights, from April 23 to 27. Also an ancient city and lightly defended, Rostock was devastated. The Royal Air Force employed 468 bombers, many of which were new Lancasters (carrying six tons of bombs). Sixty percent of all houses in the town were destroyed, 100,000 of Rostock's 140,000 residents were left homeless, the center of the city was reduced to rubble, and the Heinkel plant was severely damaged.[5] Two hundred four people were killed and 89 were seriously injuried.[6] Goebbels called the raid ''terror bombing.''

The *Terrorangriffen* (terror attacks) reached new heights on the night of May 30–31, when the Royal Air Force conducted its first thousand-bomber raid of the war. The attackers reached Cologne shortly after midnight and dropped 1,500 tons of bombs on the city—including 8,300 small incendiary (''stick'') bombs, plus HE, phosphorus, fire bomb canisters, and heavy mine bombs. Their targets were not the Rhine River port facilities or the armaments factories in the area, nor the military bases nearby. They aimed for the heart of the city. Entire streets were wiped out and about 12,000 fires were started. The mixture of bombs was devastating. The high-explosive bombs blocked streets, so fire engines could not get to many of the burning buildings. Some 18,500 buildings were destroyed, 9,500 heavily damaged, and 31,000 partially damaged; 36 factories were destroyed and 70 more were seriously damaged. Four hundred eighty-six civilians were killed, 5,000 wounded, and 100,000 left homeless—more than 59,000 of them permanently so.[7] The entire raid had taken only 90 minutes. As at Luebeck and Rostock, the Luftwaffe's air defense had proven inadequate at Cologne. Of the 1,046 bombers involved, only 40 were shot down: 3.8 percent of the total. Bomber Command did not consider this loss excessive,[8] so the raids continued.

General Karl Bodenschatz, the Reichsmarschall's liaison officer to Fuehrer Headquarters, later testified at Nuremberg that the Cologne raid caused Goering's first serious loss of prestige with Hitler. He said:

> From that moment on there were differences of opinion between Hitler and Goering which became more serious as time went on. The outward symptoms of this waning influence were as follows: first, the Fuehrer criticized Goering most severely; second, the endless conversations between Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering became shorter, less frequent, and finally ceased altogether.[9]

Hitler did not react to the bombings by significantly strengthening the defenses of the Reich; he ordered reprisal raids against Great Britain instead. He brought the He-111 Pathfinder bomber wing (KG 100) back from the Eastern Front and two bomber groups from Sicily (weakening the effort against Malta) and assigned them to Major General Joachim Coeler's IX Air Corps, which was ordered to conduct vengeance raids, in addition to its regular mine-laying duties. Some 39 reprisal raids were conducted against Britain in the seven months after Rostock, but with little result.

The air defense of the Reich from March 21, 1942, to December 23, 1943, was the responsibility of Luftwaffe Colonel General Hubert Weise, an anti-aircraft artillery expert who had commanded a flak corps on the Western Front in 1940. His Luftwaffe Command Center

(later redesignated Air Fleet Reich) included the fighter units stationed in Germany and the flak units in the Luftgaue. The Flak gun (*Fliegerabwehrkanone* or anti-aircraft cannon) was not a particularly effective weapon against aircraft. To hit its target, a flak gun crew had to know (or correctly guess) the exact altitude, speed, and direction of its target. Since one cubic mile of airspace contains 5.5 million cubic yards, and the killing zone of an 88-millimeter shell burst covered only a few thousand yards for one-fiftieth of a second, it took a well-trained and experienced gun crew to bring down an enemy bomber. The vast majority of these crews were heavily engaged on the Russian Front. Many of the flak guns in the Reich were manned by inexperienced 15, 16, and 17 year olds. As a result, German anti-aircraft fire was not accurate. During the war, it took an average of 3,400 heavy anti-aircraft shells to bring down a single enemy airplane.[10] Enemy bomber formations were decimated only when they ran into the heaviest concentrations. General Weise's main weapon against the Allied bombers was Joseph Kammhuber's XII Air Corps: the night fighters. With the bulk of the Luftwaffe's Me-109s and Me-110s engaged in Russia, however, few fighters could be spared for the defense of the Reich, so the Royal Air Force continued to press home its attacks against limited opposition.

The bombs continued to fall on Germany throughout 1942, although only two more thousand-bomber raids were launched that year. A major attack on Essen, the home of the Krupp works, was unsuccessful. Another massive raid, this one featuring 1,046 airplanes, was flown on the night of June 25–26. Its target was Bremen, especially the Focke-Wulf aircraft factory there. The plant was hit by a 4,000-pound bomb and suffered considerable damage, but because of an abrupt change in wind direction, the cloud cover did not clear as British meteorologists expected, the bombs were scattered, and the raid was not very successful.[11]

After Bremen, 32 more major raids were launched against 19 different targets, including Bremen (five raids), Duisburg (four raids), and Essen, Hamburg, and Emden (two raids each).[12] Although several fighter groups had been transferred from Russia (where they were badly needed) to the Reich, Bomber Command's impact on the German war effort had been minimal. Estimates of the total loss of the Reich's economic output due to the bombings vary from 0.7 percent to 2.5 percent of the total for 1942. Britain, on the other hand, had committed roughly 33 percent of her war economy to the prosecution of the air offensive.

Kammhuber's night fighters continued to expand (by the end of the year, he had 477 aircraft in three night fighter divisions) and began to enjoy success. By the end of 1942, the Royal Air Force had lost 2,859

aircraft in night operations and 627 British bombers had been lost in day-time raids over occupied Europe. In the last three months of the year, Bomber Command's losses exceeded 5 percent of its strength—the figure calculated as the maximum it could lose and still remain operational. Jeschonnek went so far as to say, ''Every four-engine bomber the Western Allies build makes me happy, for we will bring these ... down just as we brought down the two-engine ones, and the destruction of a four-engine bomber constitutes a much greater loss to the enemy.''[13]

Field Marshal Milch was worried, however. As the former head of Lufthansa, the German national airline, he had a much more international background than the typical air force general and a much greater appreciation of the capabilities of other nations. He understood that the military and industrial resources of the United States were about to come into full play in the air war and that, when combined with those of the British, it would overwhelm Germany's defenses. He could not get Goering or Hitler to listen to him on this vital issue, however. (As far as I know, Adolf Hitler only commented favorably on four things American: the sky scraper, the Indian reservation, Prohibition, and the Ku Klux Klan. Goering added a fifth item: the safety razor.) All Hitler did was place the Gauleiters (now under the general supervision of Martin Bormann) in charge of the civil defense, and on November 16 named them senior Reich Defense Commissioners.

Reichsmarschall Goering was especially militant in refusing to believe that the United States was manufacturing a fraction of the aircraft that it was, in fact, producing. In 1942, he forbade his people to even mention the American production figures, which he considered to be a colossal bluff.[14] That same year Walter Schellenberg, the head of the SS Foreign Intelligence Service, presented him with a special (and accurate) report on American war production. ''Everything you have written is utter nonsense,'' Goering told him. ''You should have a psychiatrist examine your mental condition.''[15]

Meanwhile, pregnant events were occurring in Western Europe. On June 15, 1942, U.S. Air Force General Carl Spaatz arrived in England to take charge of the U.S. 8th Air Force, which would direct the American heavy (strategic) bombers in the air war against the Third Reich. On August 17, 1942, 18 American Boeing B-17E ''Flying Fortresses,'' personally led by General Ira Eaker, bombed Rouen-Sotteville, France, and returned to England without loss. It was the modest beginning of the U.S. Air Force's daylight bombing operations in Europe. Convinced that unescorted daylight bombing could be successful if the bombers were sufficiently well armed, the American four-engine bombers ''bristled'' with 0.50-caliber heavy machine guns and flew a formation

designed for mutual defense and maximum combined firepower.[16] Although the Rouen raid was insignificant in itself, it argued ill for the future of the Luftwaffe in the West.

By the end of 1942, the Luftwaffe was in dire straits. Largely because of Udet's mismanagement and high losses on the Eastern Front, it was short 43 percent of its establishment in combat aircraft. It had started the war with 3,356 frontline combat aircraft, and by mid-1942 it had 4,800 frontline combat airplanes; by the end of the year, however, it had only 3,950 left. In addition (unlike the Allies), the Luftwaffe had failed to equip its units with aircraft significantly better than those with which they had entered the war. Only three new models had been introduced in appreciable numbers: the disappointing Ju-88, the FW-189 (a good short-range reconnaissance plane) and the FW-190 fighter—also a bit of a disappointment, because its performance deteriorated rapidly above 20,000 feet (that is, the altitudes at which bombers operated). The FW-190 also had teething problems and its air-cooling system problems were never fully solved. It was thus decided to employ the FW-190 on the Eastern Front and keep the old Me-109s in production; indeed, more Me-109s would be manufactured than any other aircraft in World War II.

In short, most of the warplanes of the Luftwaffe were obsolete by the end of 1942, and the combined air armaments industries of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union were vastly outproducing that of Nazi Germany. Most of the Luftwaffe's senior officers did not realize it yet, but they were on the brink of disaster. They were in for a shock in 1943 and 1944.

NOTES

1. Cooper, *GAF*, p. 185.
2. Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939–1945* (1961), vol. 2, pp. 392–93 (hereafter cited as Webster and Noble).
3. Ibid; Noble Frankland, *Bomber Offensive: The Devastation of Europe* (1970), pp. 42–43 (hereafter cited as Frankland).
4. *True to Type*, p. 131.
5. Goebbels *Diaries*, April 27, 1942.
6. Martin K. Sorge, *The Other Price of Hitler's War* (1986), p. 91.
7. Cooper, *GAF*, pp. 185–86; Earl R. Beck, *Under the Bombs* (1986), pp. 1–2 (hereafter cited as Beck, *Under the Bombs*).
8. Webster and Frankland, vol. 2, pp. 406–8.
9. Brett-Smith, p. 138.
10. Cooper, *GAF*, pp. 58 and 191.
11. Webster and Frankland, vol. 2, pp. 414–15.

12. Beck, *Under the Bombs*, p. 9.
13. Suchenwirth, ''Command.''
14. Galland, pp. 134–35.
15. Roger Manvell, *Goering* (1962), pp. 266–67.
16. Musciano, p. 57.

CHAPTER XL

HITLER'S SUMMER OFFENSIVE, 1942

IZYUM AND KHAKOV

Despite the terrible losses he suffered in the winter offensive of 1941–42, Stalin stubbornly refused to believe that he had lost the initiative and wanted to resume his attacks as soon as the water from the thaw had dried. He ordered offensives along the entire Eastern Front, from the Barents to the Black Seas, to take place between April and June. For his main effort, Stalin placed the Southwest Theater under the personal command of Marshal Timoshenko and ordered him to advance north, out of the Izyum Bulge, as soon as possible. The objectives of this operation would be the recapture of Kharkov and the defeat of the German 6th Army. Timoshenko's forces consisted of six armies and the Bobkin Armored Group, of which 23 rifle divisions, two cavalry divisions, and two cavalry corps were hurled against the 11 divisions of Paulus's 6th Army. Timoshenko had 640,000 men and 560 tanks, with some 700 in reserve, and more than 2,500 guns.

While the Russians completed their preparations, Field Marshal von Bock prepared to launch an offensive against the southern flank of the Izyum Bulge with the 1st Panzer and 17th Armies, both under the command of Ewald von Kleist, whose headquarters was temporarily designated *Armeegruppe* Kleist. Simultaneously, Paulus was to attack from the north, completing a double envelopment against the Red forces in the Izyum Bulge. This offensive, dubbed Operation Fridericus, was scheduled to begin on May 18. Timoshenko, however, struck first, launching his offensive on May 12. By May 14, Paulus had committed all of his reserves, and the entire 6th Army was falling back in the direction of Kharkov.

Bock wanted to commit all of the Fridericus forces against the Soviet spearheads, but Hitler boldly held back his reserves until Kleist was ready to launch a general offensive from the south. The Soviets were within 12 miles of Kharkov on May 17, when Kleist struck (24 hours ahead of his original schedule) with eight German infantry divisions, four Romanian infantry divisions, two panzer divisions, and a German motorized division. To everyone's surprise, the Soviet 9th Army collapsed immediately. Then, well supported by the IV Air Corps, III Panzer Corps and XXXXIV Corps broke through and marched 15 miles or more, covering two-thirds of the distance to Izyum on the first day of the attack. During the next two days, Kleist tore a 50-mile gap in the Soviet line and narrowed the neck of the Izyum Bulge to 15 miles, forcing even Stalin to react by withdrawing forces from the north and ordering them to the threatened sector—thus immediately taking the pressure off of the hard-pressed 6th Army. It was too late for the Russians to stave off disaster, however. On May 22, Kleist linked up with the 44th Infantry Division of 6th Army, sealing the Izyum Pocket and surrounding three Soviet armies and the Bobkin Group. The Reds launched a powerful breakout attempt on May 25. Primed with vodka, thousands of Soviet troops hurled themselves at the Germans, sometimes with their arms linked, screaming ''Urra! Urra!'' (''Hurrah! Hurrah!'' or ''Kill! Kill!''). They were mowed down in windrows. The pocket collapsed on the morning of May 28. Between them, Paulus and Kleist captured 240,000 men and destroyed or captured more than 1,200 tanks and 2,600 artillery pieces. General Fedor I. Kostenko, the commander of the Southwest Front, was among the dead, as were the commanders of the 6th and 57th Armies. The Germans suffered 20,000 casualties and Friedrich Paulus, the product of a lower-middle-class family and the ideal National Socialist general, was decorated with the Knight's Cross and hailed as a national hero for the first time.

THE BATTLES OF KERCH AND SEVASTOPOL

During February 1942, an ice bridge formed over the Kerch Strait, enabling the Soviets to transport a third army into the Kerch Peninsula, bringing the strength of General Dmitri T. Kozlov's Transcaucasus Front to more than 300,000 men, excluding the Sevastopol garrison, which was more than 106,000 strong. Clearing the Crimea was a major priority for the High Command of the Army, because its conquest would free an entire army for operations elsewhere. Bock felt that the 11th Army should conquer Sevastopol first and then clear the Kerch Peninsula; Manstein, however, believed that the stronger enemy should be dealt with first, so he would not be a threat to his rear during the

assault on Sevastopol. Hitler agreed with the army commander, and, on March 31, Manstein issued his preliminary plans for Operation Trappenjagd (''Bustard Hunt''), the reconquest of the Kerch. As usual, Manstein was proven correct.

Colonel General von Manstein planned to commit five German infantry divisions and a panzer division to Operation Bustard Hunt, as well as three Romanian divisions. That left three German infantry divisions and two Romanian divisions to continue the siege of Sevastopol, against eight Soviet divisions and three brigades. In the Kerch, Manstein faced 17 rifle and two cavalry divisions, plus three rifle and four tank brigades.

Over the protests of the High Command of the Luftwaffe, Hitler ordered Richthofen's VIII Air Corps to the Crimea, to support Bustard Hunt. Since an air corps was normally used to support an army or an army group, Manstein's two corps (the XXXXII and XXX) were extremely well supported in this operation; in fact, air power made all the difference.

During the period just before the start of the battle, Manstein concentrated five of his six German divisions on the southern flank, under the command of General of Artillery Maximilian Fretter-Pico's XXX Corps, leaving the XXXXII Corps to screen the rest of the line with only one German and three Romanian divisions of marginal quality. This deployment was a bit of a gamble, but it worked out well for Manstein. The attack began at 3:15 A.M. on May 8, and was closely supported by dive-bombers and fighters. By 4 P.M., the Russians had been pushed back six miles; then Fretter-Pico committed his armor. The tanks of the 22nd Panzer Division quickly turned north, and, by nightfall on May 9, had reached the Sea of Azov and closed the pocket around two Soviet armies.

The German advance east was slowed by rain, but the completely disorganized Soviets put up only sporadic resistance. The port of Kerch fell during the afternoon of the 14th, and the last resistance was crushed on May 20. Manstein had destroyed three Soviet armies and taken 176,000 prisoners. About 120,000 disorganized Russian troops had escaped into the Kuban before Kerch was captured. Manstein then turned back toward Sevastopol—this time with his entire army.

For its final assault on Sevastopol, 11th Army was heavily reinforced with artillery. Its guns were directed by Harko 306 (*Hoeheres Artillerie Kommando* or the 306th Higher Artillery Command) and included a dozen 11-inch (280-millimeter) coastal howitzers, six Gamma and three Karl weapons, plus Dora. The Gammas, like the Karls, were superheavy mortars. They had a 17-inch (420-mililmeter) bore and fired a one-ton shell. The Karls fired a 1.5-ton shell and had to be assembled or disassembled with a special 75-ton crane, but they were small

compared with Dora, which weighed 1,345 tons and needed a 60-car railroad train to move. It had a 107-foot-long barrel, a 31.5-inch (800-millimeter) bore and could lob a seven-ton shell up to 30 miles.[1] Dora was the most powerful piece of artillery in the world, and, including maintenance crews and security troops, it took 4,120 men to fire her. More conventionally, Manstein had more than 1,000 pieces of field artillery and was also given the 300th Panzer Battalion, which was equipped with Goliaths (remote-controlled demolition vehicles that could knock out a tank 50 yards away). Perhaps even more important than his artillery, however, was Manstein's air support: three Stukas, four fighter, and seven bomber wings of Richthofen's VIII Air Corps.

Manstein attacked at dawn on June 7, with Eric Hansen's LIV Corps (four divisions) on the north launching the main attack. The Sevastopol fighting was savage. Temperatures climbed to above 100° F, and the Germans suffered appalling casualties as the assault battalions slowly scratched their way forward against Red Army troops, Black Sea marines, and thousands of *Komsomols*—the teenage boys and girls of the Communist Union of Youth. The heavy artillery blasted the major fortresses, but the smaller positions—natural and manmade caves and bunkers—had to be taken by the infantry. After five days, 11th Army had already suffered more than 10,000 casualties, and Bock considered recalling the VIII Air Corps, but he did not. Finally, on June 17, Russian resistance suddenly began to deteriorate; six Soviet forts fell, and Hansen drove to the north shore of Severnaya Bay. The next day, while the LIV Corps battled against North Fort, XXX Corps pushed to Sapun Heights and faced the inner defenses of the fortress. Manstein wanted to stop and regroup, but Bock said that he had no time to do so: he needed VIII Air for the major offensives to the north (see section below).

Because of the weakened condition of his army, Manstein decided to gamble: after nightfall on June 28, his engineers silently eased 100 assault boats into Severnaya Bay. They were boarded by the men of the 22nd Air Landing and 24th Infantry Divisions, who rapidly crossed the 1,000 yards of water and landed in the enemy's rear, just east of the city. The Soviets, who were taken by surprise, were unable to counter the new threat, and many of the defending units collapsed entirely. Elsewhere, the fighting continued to be brutal, especially in the gun positions and in the caves under the cliffs overlooking the Black Sea. Rather than surrender, several commissars blew themselves up, along with their caves, their troops, and many women and children, who had taken refuge there. In other cases, soldiers, civilians, women, and children linked arms (so that no one could hold back) and rushed the German infantry, which mowed them down with their machine guns. Manstein, who had already lost 24,000 men, cleared the

built-up areas in the city and the port by artillery and air attack, killing thousands of civilians but conserving his infantry strength. The remnants of the Soviet forces surrendered on July 4. Many of the last-ditch defenders refused to surrender and took to the caves, where they were buried alive by 11th Army engineers. In all, Manstein took more than 90,000 prisoners, and some Soviet sources place their total casualties as high as 150,000. Four hundred sixty-seven guns were captured or destroyed, along with 758 mortars, 26 tanks, 141 airplanes, and 155 anti-tank guns. Hitler was so delighted by this victory that he promoted Manstein to the rank of field marshal.[2]

After Sevastopol, Hitler abandoned his original plan to send the 11th Army into the Kuban; instead, he scattered it to the four winds. The 22nd Air Landing Division was sent to Crete, while other divisions were sent to Army Groups Center or South. The XXXXII Corps remained in the Crimea. Manstein and his headquarters were sent to Army Group North for an attack against Leningrad, but only four infantry divisions accompanied him. This needless loss of a complete army formation would be sorely felt in the days ahead.

THE WEHRMACHT IN 1942

Although it had lost relatively little territory during the winter battles of 1941–42, the German Army of 1942 was a far cry from the one that had crossed into the Soviet Union so confidently in June 1941. Its losses in men and equipment had been tremendous, and its civilian-based industry was insufficient to replace its losses. It had lost more than 2,000 panzers and assault guns since Barbarossa began, but less than one-third of these had been replaced. Losses in trucks and motorized vehicles totaled almost 75,000, but only 7,500 had been replaced. The deficit was so great that Halder had almost completely demotorized the infantry divisions. More than 179,000 horses had died, but only 20,000 replacements could be secured. The Wehrmacht had lost nearly 7,000 artillery pieces on the Eastern Front, and only a fraction of them could be replaced. Virtually the entire class of 1922 had been drafted, and the armies on the Eastern Front had received 1.1 million replacements since June 22, 1941, but they were still short 625,000 men as of May 1, 1942. As of July 1, 1942, the German Army had 2,847,000 men in the East, as compared with 3,206,000 on June 22, 1941.[3] The shortages were especially serious in the infantry. Army Groups North and Center had only 35 percent of their original infantry strength, and Army Group South had only 50 percent of its June 21, 1941 infantry strength. In the spring of 1942, therefore, Hitler could only hope to launch a major offensive in only one sector, and he chose to attack in

the south. Halder proposed disbanding 11 divisions to bring the others up to strength, but Hitler refused to do so, on the grounds that such a move would have a bad effect on the morale of the German soldiers and their allies and would encourage the enemy. The flaw in this reasoning was that the understrength divisions were now completely out of balance. They had full strength or nearly full strength staffs, headquarters, support units, and service units, but the infantry regiments—which naturally had suffered the majority of the casualties—had few riflemen left. After the failure of Stalin's winter offensive of 1941–42, the strength of the average German infantry company was reduced from 180 to 80. (The combat value of the typical German infantry company, however, did not decline by a corresponding percentage because of the effective organizational structures of the smaller companies and because the number of automatic weapons and machine guns in the smaller units were markedly increased.) Many of the veteran divisions, however, were forced to reorganize their infantry regiments, which were reduced from nine to six infantry battalions each. By July 1942, there were 29 more divisions on the Eastern Front than in June 1941, but the German strength in Russia had fallen by 359,000 men.[4] As a result, the German divisions earmarked for Operation Blue (as Hitler's summer offensive of 1942 was codenamed) could be brought up to strength in terms of manpower only by reducing the divisions of Army Groups North and Center to 50 percent of their authorized establishment or less; the training time for the replacements sent to these army groups was reduced from six to two months. The panzer divisions of Army Group South were brought up to a strength of three tank battalions each, but the panzer divisions of the other army groups were cut to a strength of only one or two tank battalions. Even so, the spearhead divisions of Army Group South would attack with only 85 percent of their authorized vehicle strength and only 80 percent of their authorized tank strength.[5] The artillery battalions of Army Group South could only be brought up to strength via similar measures; the artillery batteries of Army Groups North and Center had to be reduced from four to three guns, and many of these were obsolete or captured pieces. In short, the number of divisions in the German Wehrmacht was now a misleading statistic because the combat power of many of them (and eventually almost all of them) no longer warranted the term. In addition, the divisions created after the spring of 1942 would be much weaker than divisions formed previously.[6]

To make matters worse, as Milward wrote, ''The whole mechanism of distributing arms at the front was faulty.''[7] Newly formed divisions got 90 percent of all the newly manufactured (and best) weapons and equipment; the veteran divisions got 10 percent. Naturally, the new divisions suffered heavier losses in their first battle than the

experienced units, resulting in an unnecessarily high loss of new weapons and equipment, while the veteran infantry regiments struggled along with worn-out and outmoded guns, equipment, and vehicles.

One potential source of manpower shunned by Hitler and the Nazis was the Eastern volunteer. Some enterprising German generals were recruiting and forming ad hoc Eastern battalions as early as the summer of 1941. By the spring of 1942, German forces had ''absorbed'' an estimated 700,000 former Red Army soldiers into their ranks, including 4,000 officers. Ultimately, more than 1 million Eastern volunteers (many of them former Soviet soldiers) joined the German Army, mostly as ''Hiwis'' (*Hilfsfreiwillige* or auxiliary volunteers).[8] Hitler disapproved of recruiting these ''racially inferior'' volunteers and, on February 10, 1942, issued an order forbidding further recruitment. This order was not strictly observed in some places and other commands ignored it altogether. By the summer of 1942, Soviet prisoners of war and volunteers made up 15 percent of the personnel of some divisions. Many were used only as auxiliaries at first (that is, as cooks, mess hall helpers, drivers, stretcher bearers, and so on) but were later used more and more as combat troops. As a result, Hitler issued another order in June 1942, stating that no further units of this type were to be formed after August 1.[9] Again his order was largely ignored, especially by Colonel General Ewald von Kleist (the Prussian ex-cavalryman who now commanded the 1st Panzer Army), who continued to form large numbers of Cossack cavalry battalions and to use them most effectively.

Despite the continued ''illegal'' recruitment of Hiwis, the Axis forces in the East had a strength of only 3,010,370 men as of September 20, 1942. They were opposed by 4,255,840 Soviet troops, even after the Red Army suffered appalling losses in 1941 and 1942 (see Table 40.1). In

Table 40.1
The Odds on the Eastern Front, September 20, 1942

Unit	Axis Forces	Soviet Forces
Army Group North	708,400	1,001,610
Army Group Center	1,012,070	1,356,340
Army Group B[b]	818,250	1,379,300
Army Group A[b]	266,350	518,590
TOTALS	3,013,370[a]	4,255,840

Notes:
[a]Ration Strength only. Ration strength was an estimated 250,000 men higher than actual combat strength.
[b]Formed when Army Group South was divided on July 7, 1943.
Source:
Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin* (1968), pp. 34–35.

addition, the Russians would receive 1.4 million men from its recruiting class of 1925—three times the number Germany would receive. Quantitatively, the odds against the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front were already growing long.[10] Morale in the Wehrmacht, however, remained quite high. Having held off the Soviet threat in the winter, the Germans felt that they had proven that they could defeat the enemy at its best.

On the other side of the line, Stalin was much less hesitant than Hitler to convert to a total war economy. During the first half of 1942, the Soviet industry turned out more than 53,000 pieces of artillery, compared with 30,000 in the last six months of 1941. Airplane output remained steady at 8,300, but tank production increased to 11,200 during the first half of 1942—almost four times the German output of 3,000 over the same period. By the spring of 1942, Stalin had 5.6 million men in his armed forces and could field 348 rifle or cavalry divisions, 239 rifle or independent tank brigades, and 329 independent regiments (excluding 10 armies in Stavka reserve). By the time the spring offensive began, he had 6,000 tanks, 55,600 guns, and about 3,000 modern combat aircraft. Hitler, on the other hand, had 3.9 million men in the ground forces (excluding Allies), of which 2.6 million were on the Eastern Front; 212,000 in occupied Russia; 150,000 in Finland; and 1.3 million in the Replacement Army, in occupied Europe, or in North Africa. These figures exclude allied forces, which were as follows: Finnish, 300,000; Romanian, 330,000; Hungarian, 70,000; Italian, 68,000; Slovakian, 28,000; and Spanish volunteers, 14,000.[11] Most of the allied formations, however, were of limited value at best, except for the Finns and Spaniards.

Meanwhile, the Luftwaffe was also having serious problems. First, it had lost its numerical parity. From July to December 1941 alone, Russian factories turned out 5,173 fighters, British factories produced 4,408 fighters, and the Americans manufactured even more, but German factories could produce only 1,619 fighters for the Luftwaffe.[12]

Second, it had lost its technical advantage and was waging war with obsolete airplanes. Seeing the writing on the wall, Ernst Udet, the chief of air armaments, drank two bottles of cognac on November 17, 1941. He then telephoned his mistress in a state of hysteria. ''I can't stand it any longer!'' he cried, and shot himself. (The fact that he had learned about the Holocaust three days before was a major contributing factor to his despair; Ernst Udet may have been incompetent, but he was no monster.) He was officially reported as having been killed in a crash while testing a new airplane. Goering cried like a small child at Udet's funeral, but later blamed him for the destruction of the Luftwaffe.

Erhard Milch succeeded Udet in all of his offices and took energetic measures to restore the Luftwaffe to its former position, but he could

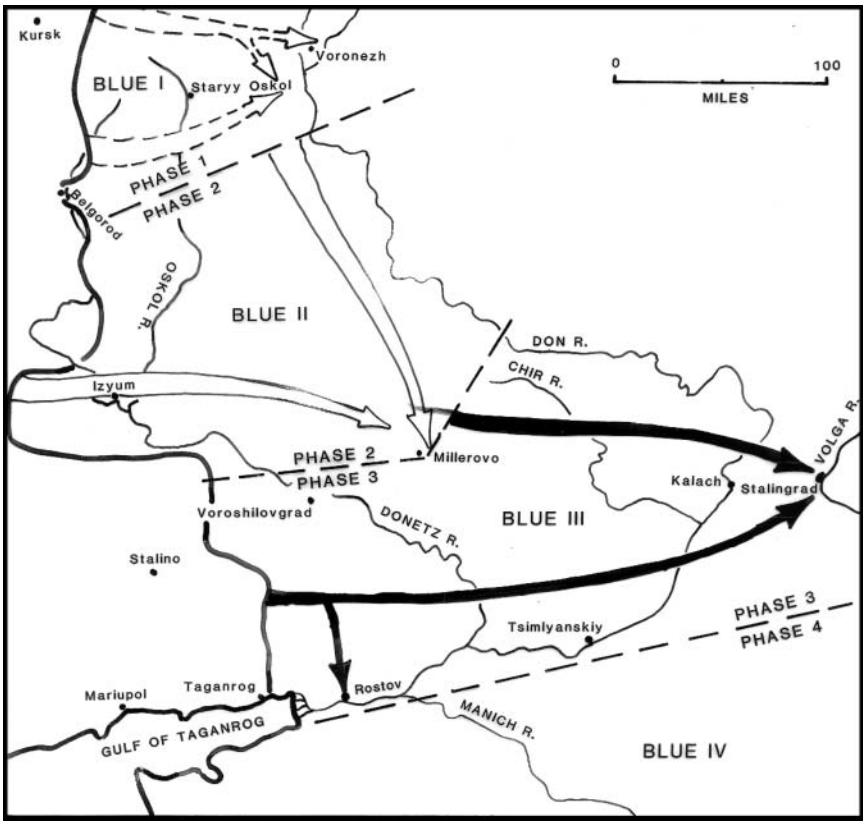
not make good on four years lost to mismanagement and neglect. For the air force, the future looked grim indeed. In mid-1942, for example, as it prepared for the summer offensive, the Luftwaffe's strength in the East stood at 2,750 combat airplanes, out of a total of 4,262 in the entire air force. More than 64 percent of the Luftwaffe's combat aircraft were now on the Eastern Front, and the Red Air Force still outnumbered it at least three to one.[13]

Even to reach this strength, General Jeschonnek, the chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, had to dip into the training establishment once more. This time he sent fighter training units and their instructor pilots to the front. Adolf Galland, who had succeeded the late Werner Moelders as the general of fighter forces,[14] protested this decision and called on the chief of the Air General Staff to increase the number of fighter training units, instead of decreasing them. ''If you reduce them now instead of forcing them up, you are sawing off the branch on which you are sitting,'' he warned. General Jeschonnek listened quietly, without interrupting. He did not question the validity of Galland's arguments. When he had finished, Jeshonnek spoke ''without vehemence, presumption, or demagogy.'' He told the new general of fighters that he understood the seriousness of his decision, but the rapid annihilation of the Soviet Union was an essential prerequisite for the continuation of the war. This was the Fuehrer's goal for the summer offensive of 1942, and all forces, including the Luftwaffe, now had to be concentrated for this decisive blow. ''He was fully aware of the deathly crisis in which the Luftwaffe stood because of the war in the East,'' Galland recalled.[15] He also realized that, if the gamble failed, the Luftwaffe training branch probably would not be able to furnish enough replacement fighter pilots for the Western Front—or for the defense of the Reich. He sent the fighter squadrons east just the same. Victory over the Soviet Union in the summer offensive of 1942 had priority over all other considerations.

THE PLAN

In the meantime, Hitler, OKH, and Army Group South made the final plan for the decisive summer offensive of 1942, and it was complicated. Codenamed Operation Blue, (*Blau*), it would be carried out in four phases. Prior to its beginning, two preliminary operations, Operations Wilhelm and Fridericus II, would be executed. Wilhelm called for the 6th Army to cut off and destroy the Soviet 28th Army in what was left of the Volchansk salient. In Fridericus II, 1st Panzer Army was suppose to surround two Soviet armies north and east of Izyum. It would move 1st Panzer's front 30 miles further east, into its

Figure 40.1
Operation Blue: The Plan for the Summer Campaign of 1942



jump-off area for Blue. The plans for Blue I–III are shown on Figure 40.1. Just before Blue II began, Army Group A was to be activated under the command of Field Marshal List, and Bock's Army Group South would become Army Group B. Blue III was to conclude with the capture of Stalingrad. In Blue IV, the final phase of the offensive, Army Group A (lst Panzer, 4th Panzer, and 17th Armies) was to advance southeast, taking the Caucasus oil districts of Maikop and Grozny, and even seizing Baku, the oil city on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, which produced more than 70 percent of Russia's oil. This would secure Germany's oil resources and, according to Hitler, cripple the Soviet Union's war economy. The Caucasus was important because it produced valuable quantities of corn, manganese, and natural gas.

The Blue operations had two major objectives: the Caucasus oil districts and Stalingrad, a major industrial city on the Volga. Hitler, however, could not decide which had priority, or even which to take first. As the campaign developed, he decided to go for both, simultaneously. This would cause both advances immense difficulties and would eventually cause both to fail.

Operations Wilhelm and Fridericus II were both disappointing. Instead of stubbornly holding at all costs, as in previous battles, the Russians retreated rapidly, and most of them managed to escape before the Germans could close the jaws of the pockets. In Wilhelm, for example, 6th Army only captured a mere 24,800 prisoners, and Fridericus II yielded only 22,800 prisoners. The new Soviet tactics, which enabled them to avoid the costly defeats of 1941, were not properly appreciated by many of the German officers at the time. Sixth Army, for example, concluded that the Russian capacity for resistance had declined considerably, and Bock thought that the Soviets were going to avoid the risk of big defeats until the Americans intervened.[16]

OPERATION BLUE

Misfortune seemed to dog Operation Blue from the beginning. In direct violation of Hitler's standing orders, Major Joachim Reichel, the Ia (operations officer) of the 23rd Panzer Division, boarded a Fieseler Storch with a copy of the plan for the attack. The Storch strayed off course to the east, was fired on, and crashed two miles behind Russian lines. Several hours later, a German patrol found the airplane with a bullet hole in the fuel tank. Reichel and the pilot were missing. Two days later, another patrol found a grave containing two unidentified bodies. Reichel's papers had disappeared without a trace.

Furious over this incident, Hitler relieved Georg Stumme, the commander of the XXXX Panzer Corps; Lieutenant Colonel Gerhard Franz, his chief of staff; and Major General Baron Hans von Boineburg-Lengsfeld, the commander of the 23rd Panzer Division, of their posts. Bock protested against relieving commanders in critical posts on the eve of a great offensive, but to no avail. Baron Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg was named commander of the XXXX. Stumme and Franz were both court-martialed. Hermann Goering presided and was impressed with the pair; they were given minimal sentences of five and two years' fortress imprisonment, respectively.

Operation Blue began at 2:15 A.M. on June 28. By noon, Hoth's spearhead, General of Panzer Troops Werner Kempf's XXXXVIII Panzer Corps, had gained 10 miles. It gained another 10 that afternoon and crossed the Kshen the next day. By this time, however, the Soviets were retreating

rapidly. Meanwhile, on June 30, Paulus began his offensive (Blue II). By the end of the day, his spearheads had reached the Korocha River—20 miles behind the Russian front. By July 1, the Soviets were in full retreat. The next day, the 4th Panzer Army linked up with the 6th Army near Staryy Oskol, but the pockets yielded only a few thousand prisoners.

By July 4, Hoth (who had traded places with Ruoff and was now commander of the 4th Panzer Army) had crossed the Don, and the 24th Panzer Division seized Voronezh by coup de main on July 6, taking 28,000 prisoners and capturing 1,000 tanks.[17] Hitler and Halder, however, were both unhappy with Bock's conduct of the operation. Hitler had intended that the infantry of the 2nd Army should occupy the Don River line, while the armored units pushed rapidly southward—not toward Voronezh, which lay almost due east. Hitler felt that Bock and Hoth had concentrated too much armor on their northern flank and were engaging in a mindless ''stampede'' toward the city, and Halder agreed with the dictator.[18] On the 5th, the Fuehrer signaled Bock and asked why the XXXX Panzer Corps had not yet reached the Don. The field marshal tactlessly (and untruthfully) replied that it was behind schedule largely because its two best generals had been fired in the Reichel affair. Meanwhile, the divisions of the Soviet Southwest Front were retreating all along 6th Army's front, and Bock's armor, instead of being in position to cut them off as planned, was far to the north.

It does seem that Field Marshal von Bock was obsessed with Voronezh and a possible threat to his left flank, and he was not reassured on July 6, when the Soviet 5th Tank Army counterattacked near the city. The Russian frontal attacks were conducted without skill, and the 9th Panzer Division destroyed two Soviet tank brigades in a single battle. Even so, the Reds committed nine rifle divisions, four rifle brigades, and seven tank brigades to the fighting. The Voronezh sector was not secure until July 13.

Because the German armor piled up around Voronezh, two Soviet armies escaped and Blue I produced a disappointing total of only 70,000 prisoners. Meanwhile, Blue II was also progressing unsatisfactorily, because the Russians were retreating almost everywhere, avoiding the German pincher movements. As early as the afternoon of July 8, Bock signaled Halder that Blue II was ''dead,'' and if the armies advanced in accordance with their existing orders, they would ''most likely strike into thin air.''[19] In the meantime, an impatient Hitler ordered 1st Panzer and 4th Panzer Armies to encircle Millerovo. Bock was right: the encirclement yielded only about 40,000 prisoners. The most remarkable (and prophetic) catch was 22 trainloads of American and British lend-lease tanks and other supplies. In the meantime, 2nd and 6th Armies were also experiencing a lack of success. By mid-July, they had taken only 30,000 prisoners.[20]

On July 7, Army Group A was activated, but it was too late to cut off the Russian forces west of the Don. Even so, Hitler desperately ordered a giant encirclement north of Rostov and the mouth of the Don, disregarding Halder's advise and his own previous plans to advance on Stalingrad. On July 13, Hoth's 4th Panzer Army was transferred to the newly activated Army Group A, which was charged with conducting the Don encirclement. At the same time, Field Marshal Keitel telephoned von Bock and sacked him, on the grounds that his mobile divisions had been too slow in coming down from Voronezh, because of poor fuel arrangements. Bock protested, correctly pointing out that fuel supplies were an OKH responsibility, but Keitel informed him that the decision had been Hitler's, and discussion at the moment was out of the question. He suggested that Bock retire quietly and implied that he might be employed again. (He never was.) Bock was succeeded by Colonel General Baron Maximilian von Weichs, and General of Infantry Hans von Salmuth took over 2nd Army.

On the night of July 13–14, Army Groups A and B received their new orders, which were aimed at preventing the Soviets from escaping south and east of the Don. Stalingrad, the original Blue III objective, was not even mentioned. It was already too late, however, and all Hitler accomplished was the recapture of Rostov (on July 23), the capture of 83,000 prisoners (an insufficient number, compared with the hauls of 1941), and a giant pileup of German forces along the lower Don. On July 19, therefore, Hitler ordered 1st Panzer and 4th Panzer Armies to cross the lower Don between Rostov and Zimlyanskaya on a front 125 miles wide. Army Group A was ordered to pursue and destroy the Russian armies and to occupy the Black Sea coast (an entirely new strategic objective), to eliminate the bases and ports of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet. List's armies were to simultaneously seize the Maikop and Grozny oilfields, and prepare to continue on to Baku—700 miles southeast of Rostov. Hoth's 4th Panzer Army also received a new task: cover the gap between Army Group A (advancing south) and Army Group B (slowly advancing east)—a gap of several hundred miles and growing, since the two army groups were advancing on divergent axes. Hoth was assigned to Army Group B at this time. Meanwhile, to direct the campaign in southern Russia, Hitler moved his headquarters from East Prussia to Vinnitsa in the western Ukraine on July 14.

THE CAUCASUS CAMPAIGN

While Hitler was driving south, the Russians rallied for the defense of Stalingrad. Tens of thousands of civilian workers prepared Stalingrad for defense by constructing three lines of defensive works around

the western half of the city; the outer line was almost 300 miles in length. More than 80 home guard and workers' battalions were organized and sent to the front.

All of this feverish Soviet activity was, for the moment at least, unnecessary. Paulus's 6th Army was the only German formation within striking distance of the city, and, since Army Group A had absolute priority for supply, it was soon so short of fuel and ammunition that Paulus pulled back his spearheads on July 26. The change of focus did not please Field Marshal List, the commander-in-chief of Army Group A. He was more than 700 miles from his final objective, and the width of his frontage was 800 miles long. In addition, the elevation of the Caucasus ranges extended up to 18,000 feet and could only be reached by crossing a series of east-west running rivers, which made good natural defensive positions. The plains just south of the Don were covered by huge cornfields, but, as the troops marched south, they gradually gave way to a hot, dry steppe. List's supply lines were already overextended and every step his spearheads took to the south only made the situation worse. Soviet resistance was weak, but Army Group A's motorized and panzer formations were often restricted or immobilized by lack of fuel; they could not overtake the Red Army, which fell back deeper into the interior.

Despite his difficulties, the capable and experienced field marshal was determined to do what he could; however, as his divisions marched south, Hitler shifted his strategy again. On July 20, Jodl announced that the fate of the Caucasus would be decided at Stalingrad and that some of Army Group A's strength should be moved to 6th Army. Halder sarcastically confided in his diary that he was glad that this thought had finally arisen in ''the brilliant society of the OKW.'' In the meantime, List's infantry was pushing forward at a rate of up to 30 miles a day, and 1st Panzer Army breached the Russian defenses to a depth of 50 miles along a 100-mile front. The daily temperatures in the steppe now reached 100° F, and the men were tormented by sand storms and thirst. Fuel had to be flown in to Kleist's spearheads, but the rapid advance continued. Three Soviet armies proved unable to halt Kleist's advance, so, during the first days of August, the Maikop oilfields were turned over to the demolition squads. The panzer army pursued on to the foothills of the Caucasus, but the supply and logistical problems, the terrain, and Army Group A's lack of supply priority combined to slow Kleist's advance to around five miles per day after August 15. Air support was also a problem. Hitler's change of focus forced Richthofen (now the commander-in-chief, 4th Air Fleet) to reinforce the VIII Air Corps (supporting Army Group B) at the expense of IV Air Corps (supporting Army Group A). Stalin, meanwhile, reinforced his Caucasus front to a strength of two full air

armies. By late August, the Red Air Force had air superiority in almost every sector and, by the second half of August, Army Group A's momentum was failing off everywhere. The German armies in the south had simply outrun their supply lines.

Kleist was now 60 miles from the Grozny oilfields and 350 miles from Baku. By August 20, he was opposed by about Soviet 40 divisions and brigades. His own army had eight divisions. Despite his many difficulties, the Prussian cavalry general pushed on and reached the Terek and Baksan Rivers. On August 25, he thrust across the Terek on both sides of Mozdok and struggled southward, against fierce resistance. Meanwhile, the Soviet 4th Kuban Guards Cavalry Corps rounded his open left flank and tried to seize Mozdok. Kleist had no choice but to stop his advance on September 1 and send troops to the rear, to defend his line of communications. The German advance on the oilfields was stalled. List's other army, Ruoff's 17th, was also checked near Novorossisk and in the Caucasus.

List, meanwhile, visited Hitler's headquarters at Vinnitsa on August 31, carrying with him an unmarked, small-scale map. Although quite polite while List was present, Hitler flew into a tirade against him as soon as he left, because he felt that the marshal should have brought detailed aerial photographs, showing why XXXXIX Mountain Corps was stalled. In throwing his fit, Hitler ignored the fact that, by Fuehrer Order, commanders were forbidden to carry large-scale maps showing troop dispositions. Later that week, Hitler sent Jodl to Army Group A Headquarters at Stalino, to investigate List's failures. Here, on September 7, List and General of Mountain Troops Rudolf Konrad, commander of the XXXXIX Mountain and a close personal friend of Jodl's since their cadet days in Bavaria, convinced the OKW officer that further advances in that sector were impossible. When Jodl returned the following day and presented these views to Hitler, the dictator exploded. How dare Jodl take a position diametrically opposed to his own. To the Fuehrer's surprise, Jodl rounded on him with some heat and even suggested that Hitler's own orders, which had been faithfully followed, were responsible for the stalemate in the Caucasus. Hitler was momentarily taken aback; he then ranted and roared at the unfortunate general and accused him of letting his fellow Bavarians hoodwink him. He accused Jodl of betraying him, stormed out of the room, and refused to shake hands with either Jodl or Keitel until January 1943. At noon that day, Hitler announced that henceforth he would take his midday meal in his quarters, ending his tradition of eating with Jodl and other members of his entourage. He left no one in any doubt as to his hatred of and distrust of his generals—even those of OKW.

The Hitler-Jodl confrontation resulted in a number of changes. First to go was Field Marshal List, who was sacked on September 9. Fuehrer

interference in the details of the army's business reached a new peak when Hitler personally assumed command of Army Group A. The day-to-day administrative business was left to Lieutenant General Hans von Greiffenberg, the group's chief of staff. Kleist and Ruoff were ordered to submit situation reports (down to battalion level) to Hitler every other day, through OKH. Hitler also considered replacing Keitel with Kesselring and decided to replace Jodl with Paulus as soon as Stalingrad had been captured. Walter Warlimont, Jodl's deputy, was also earmarked for professional exile. Bodewin Keitel was relieved of his duties as chief of personnel and, after five months of involuntary retirement, was exiled to a territorial command in Poland (Wehrkreis XX). He was replaced by Rudolf Schmundt, Hitler's own adjutant. Finally, on September 17, Hitler decided to replace Halder with Major General Kurt Zeitzler as chief of the General Staff of the Army, a change that took effect on September 24. Keitel suggested that either Manstein or Paulus would be a better choice, but he was ignored by the Fuehrer. Halder was dismissed on the afternoon of September 23, and he left weeping. As one general put it, Halder had been kicked out like a dog piddling on the carpet. The OKW generals rejoiced at his departure, and at least one of them proclaimed that the German Army could now be steeped throughout with the true spirit of National Socialism.[22]

Kurt Zeitzler, the former chief of staff of the 1st Panzer Army and a personal friend of Rudolf Schmundt's, was known throughout the army as ''Thunderball'' because of his incredible energy, which belied his rotund figure. He was jovial except with his direct subordinates, with whom he was often arbitrary and overly harsh. In the late 1930s, as a lieutenant colonel on Jodl's staff, he was primarily responsible for drafting Fall Gruen, the plan for the occupation of Czechoslovakia. He had been Kleist's chief of staff in Poland, Belgium, France, and Russia, until he was promoted to chief of staff of Rundstedt's Army Group D in April, 1942. Here he had played a credible part in repulsing the British-Canadian raid on Dieppe in August. He further advanced his standing with Hitler by suggesting that these landings were not a raid at all, but an attempted Anglo-Saxon invasion of the European mainland. Upon his arrival at Fuehrer Headquarters, he was promoted to general of infantry, bypassing the rank of lieutenant general altogether. The Fuehrer's first orders to him were to replace the older army commanders and to scrap the traditional red-striped trousers and insignias of the General Staff. Zeitzler refused. Hitler had by no means appointed the subservient ''yes-man'' that he wanted, but he had weakened the army and the General Staff. The 47-year-old Zeitzler was junior to dozens of officers and had been promoted over the heads of hundreds of others. This naturally invoked the jealously of many and

weakened his position. Zeitzler's appointment simultaneously weakened the position of the chief of the General Staff. By giving the post to such a junior officer, Hitler deprived it of the advantages of seniority, command experience, and authority in the eyes of the army and army group commanders. Hitler had, in fact, debased the office, and thus made his position even stronger in the process.

Zeitzler further undercut his own position with the senior generals of the army by publicly declaring that henceforth loyalty to and confidence in the Fuehrer was now the order of the day at OKH. In accordance with this order, Zeitzler accepted the decision to create the Luftwaffe Field divisions (air force ground combat divisions) without protest. Lieutenant Colonel Burkhart Mueller-Hillebrand, the highly capable chief of the Organizations Branch of OKH, did object and was quickly sacked by Zeitzler. He ended up on the Eastern Front.

The fact that he at first acted as little more than Hitler's mouthpiece to the army group commanders further undercut Zeitzler's standing in the eyes of the generals, but strengthened it with Hitler. Keitel and Jodl hoped that, with OKH under Zeitzler, they would at last be able to establish a unified army command under OKW—including control of the Eastern Front. Zeitzler, however, promptly dissociated himself from Keitel and Jodl and used Jodl's temporary disgrace to win back some of the ground Halder had lost to OKW. Zeitzler's standing with Hitler would not begin to fall until he began to show too much backbone and questioned too many of the Fuehrer's orders—but that lay in the future.

THE DRIVE TO STALINGRAD

While Army Group A was driving south toward the Caucasus, Weichs's Army Group B advanced east, against Stalingrad. In late July, the Italian 8th Army (six infantry divisions) took over the Don front between Pavlovsk and the Khoper, freeing Paulus to move more of his divisions to the east. Due to fuel shortages, however, 6th Army was immobilized on the Don for almost two weeks. Meanwhile, on July 31, 4th Panzer Army was split in half. Hoth was ordered to drive north against Stalingrad with three of his corps (which controlled only four German and four Romanian divisions). His fourth corps, Geyr's XXXX Panzer, was assigned to the 1st Panzer Army and was ordered to advance south, finalizing the gap between the two army groups. Hoth's advance toward Stalingrad was slow, however, due to the same fuel shortages that immobilized 6th Army altogether.

It was not until August 7 that Paulus had accumulated enough fuel to resume the advance. His attacks that day were immensely

successful, however, thanks primarily to an order Stalin issued forbidding the Red forces west of the Don to take one step back. Before the day was out, XIV Panzer and XXIV Panzer Corps had broken the Soviet lines and linked up in the Soviet rear, surrounding the bulk of the 62nd Army. Along with the infantry of the LI Corps, they spent the next four days clearing the Kalach Pocket, which yielded nearly 50,000 prisoners, as well as some 270 tanks and 600 guns.

After crossing the Don, 6th Army advanced out of the Vertyachiy bridgehead at dawn on August 23 and drove toward the Volga on a narrow front. Heavily supported by the VIII Air Corps, XIV Panzer Corps slashed through the 62nd Army and gained 50 miles before dark. Hube's 16th Panzer Division reached the river north of the city about nightfall, while Richthofen pounded Stalingrad with his bombers. It all, 1,000 tons of bombs fell on the city on August 23 alone. That night, Stalingrad was described as a sea of flames. It was later reported that one could read a newspaper 20 miles away by the light of the fires. An estimated 40,000 civilians were killed in this attack and a second raid the following day, and the city was left without water. Hube's troops pushed to the outskirts of the city that evening, but could advance no further. By August 25, XIV Panzer Corps, which occupied a salient nearly 30 miles long and only two miles wide, was under heavy attack from all sides. Wietersheim had to bring up fuel and ammunition by night, via armored convoy. Paulus signaled him not to retreat; LI and VIII Corps would extend their lines to the east, to close up with XIV Panzer.

Meanwhile, Hoth was checked by stubborn Russian resistance and minefields north of Tinguta. He had to break off his offensive, regroup, and attack again, 20 miles to the west. It was not until August 31 that his vanguards cut the railroad south of Pitomnik, less than 20 miles from Stalingrad. The Soviet 62nd and 64th Armies, which had been pinning down 6th Army and putting up a desperate resistance, suddenly retired to the east, into the inner defenses of Stalingrad, immediately taking the pressure off of the hard-pressed XIV Panzer Corps. While VIII Air Corps launched around-the-clock bombing raids (terror attacks) on the city, 4th Panzer and 6th Army linked up at Gonchary, seven miles north of Voroponovo Station on September 3–4. The stage was set for the decisive Battle of Stalingrad.

NOTES

1. Rudolf Lusar, *German Secret Weapons of World War II* (1959), pp. 15–16.

2. Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, Anthony G. Powell, trans. (1958; reprint ed., 1982), p. 259 (hereafter cited as Manstein); Plocher MS 1943;

O'Neill, pp. 504–11; John Shaw and the editors of Time-Life Books, *Red Army Resurgent* (1979), pp. 36–39 (hereafter cited as Shaw et al.).

3. Burkhart Mueller-Hillebrand, Burkhart. *Das Heer, 1933–1945* (1954–69), vol. 3, table 38.
4. Seaton, *German Army*, p. 90.
5. Kramarz, p. 95.
6. Carell, *Hitler Moves East*.
7. Alan S. Milward, *The German Economy at War* (1965), p. 17.
8. Juergen Thorwald, *The Illusion: Soviet Soldiers in Hitler's Armies*, Richard and Clara Winston, trans. (1975), pp. xiv–xv.
9. Kramarz, p. 98.
10. Earl F. Ziemke, ''The German Northern Theater of Operations, 1940–1945,'' United States Department of the Army, Pamphlet 20-271 (1959), p. 34 (hereafter cited as Ziemke).
11. Ziemke and Bauer, pp. 283–303; *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommando des Wehrmacht* (1961; reprint ed., 1982), June 28, 1942 (hereafter cited as *Kriegstagebuch des OKW*).
12. Plocher MS 1941; Overy, *Air War*, p. 62.
13. Cooper, *GAF*, p. 245.
14. Werner Moelders had been killed in an air accident near Breslau on November 22, 1941. He was returning to the Eastern Front after attending the funeral of Ernst Udet.
15. Galland, pp. 87–88.
16. Ziemke and Bauer, pp. 316–19.
17. Irving, *Hitler's War*, p. 401.
18. Ziemke and Bauer, p. 339.
19. Ibid., p. 344.
20. Ibid.
21. According to Ziemke and Bauer (p. 349). Seaton (*Russo-German War*, pp. 275–76) put the total number of prisoners at 14,000.
22. Ziemke and Bauer, p. 364; Halder Diaries, September 24, 1942.
23. Irving, *Hitler's War*, p. 465.

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CHAPTER XLI

THE BATTLE OF STALINGRAD

RATTENKRIEG

In 1942, Stalingrad was one of the most important industrial cities in the Soviet Union, producing approximately a quarter of Russia's tanks and other mechanized vehicles. It was a narrow, ribbon-like city of 600,000 people, stretching almost 20 miles along the Volga, which was a mile wide at this point. Most of its buildings had been reduced to ruins by Richthofen's air raids of August 23 and 24, when more than 100 blocks of downtown Stalingrad were destroyed. The ruins, however, provided excellent defensive positions for the Soviets. In addition, the entire district was cross-cut by a series of deep ravines, carved out of the soil by small west-east running Volga tributaries. These ravines would make good anti-tank ditches in the days ahead.

To Stalin, this city became the focal point of the war. He believed that its loss would give Hitler the option of wheeling north against Moscow or south to the Caucasus and might convince the Western Allies that the Soviet Union was doomed. ''Not one step backward,'' he ordered his commanders in Stalingrad. ''The Volga now has only one bank.'' Hitler also became obsessed with the City of Stalin. ''You may rest assured that nobody will ever drive us out of Stalingrad,'' he told the German people. From that point on, a retreat from the Volga became psychologically impossible for the Nazi dictator. Stalingrad became a kind of giant magnet, drawing in dozens of units from both armies into a lethal vortex of house-to-house fighting, in which superior German maneuverability was neutralized and all of the advantages accrued to the defense. It was exactly the kind of fighting the Soviet soldiers, with less tactical skill than their opponents but with grim stubbornness, incredible tenacity, and an infinite capacity for suffering, naturally excelled.

Sixth Army began the battle with 250,000 men, 500 tanks, 7,000 guns and mortars, and 25,000 horses. It was commanded by Friedrich Wilhelm Paulus, a Hessian and the son of a bookkeeper in the civil service. Born in 1890, he joined the Imperial Army in 1910 and was commissioned in 1911. During World War I, Paulus fought on both the Eastern and Western Fronts and in Romania, and emerged from the war as a captain and staff officer with a reputation for attention to detail. During the interwar years, he accumulated a number of revealing efficiency reports. One declared, ''He is slow, but very methodical . . . is inclined to spend overmuch time on his appreciation, before issuing his orders.'' The report also commented that he was too fond of working all night, sustaining himself on coffee and cigarettes. Another evaluator commented, ''This officer lacks decisiveness.''[1] He nevertheless advanced to the rank of major general by 1939, because of his personal charm, his ability to get along with his superiors, and his capacity for hard General Staff work. On August 26, 1939, just five days before the war began, he was named chief of staff of Walter von Reichenau's 10th (later 6th) Army, which was the main German assault force in the invasion of Poland. The two men were perfectly matched: the dashing, energetic, and often-harsh Reichenau hated paperwork and the details of running a headquarters, while Paulus might have been chained to his desk. They performed effectively in Poland, Belgium, and France, before Paulus was promoted to lieutenant general and became deputy chief of the General Staff of the Army and chief of the operations branch in September 1940. In this post, he first came to the attention of Adolf Hitler, who was impressed by his bearing, charm, and background; like Hitler, Paulus was a ''commoner,'' and the Fuehrer hated aristocratic General Staff officers.

Reichenau, meanwhile, was placed in charge of the southern sector of the Eastern Front on December 1, 1941, and persuaded Hitler to give Paulus command of the 6th Army. He received a special promotion to general of panzer troops on January 1, 1942, and assumed command of the army on January 5.

Field Marshal von Reichenau was a powerful and dominating figure who no doubt intended to guide his former chief of staff and teach him what it took to command an army in combat. Reichenau, however, suffered a major heart attack on January 12, 1942, and died on January 17. He was succeeded by the less able Fedor von Bock, who was eventually replaced by the equally mediocre Colonel General Baron von Weichs.

It would be difficult to imagine a general less suited to command a field army than Friedrich Paulus in 1942. He was a solid and technically proficient General Staff officer but had never held a command higher than that of an experimental motorized battalion. He was a desk

soldier from his head to his toes. Tall, slim, and fastidious, he habitually wore gloves because he hated dirt. He bathed and changed clothes twice a day and was sarcastically nicknamed ''Our Most Elegant Gentleman'' and ''The Noble Lord'' by many of his combat-hardened peers.[2] (It must be recalled that most Europeans do not bathe daily, as is the custom with Americans.) Worse than his lack of experience, however, was his lack of decisiveness, his slowness, and the fact that he had convinced himself that Adolf Hitler was an infallible military genius whose judgment was far superior to his own. This was to be a fatal combination in the weeks ahead.

The Battle of Stalingrad began on September 2, 1942, when General Vasili Chuikov's rebuilt 62nd Army withdrew into the city. It would be heavily reinforced throughout the battle by the Volga Flotilla, which ferried men, supplies, ammunition, and equipment across the river.

On the German side, Weichs, the commander-in-chief of Army Group B and Paulus's immediate superior, felt that it was essential to attack the city immediately, before the Soviets had time to fully organize their defenses, but Paulus was tied down for several days by hastily launched counterattacks from the Russian forces on his northern flank. While these ill-coordinated attacks were in progress, he was reluctant to launch an assault on the city. This hesitation and his cautious attitude cost him thousands of casualties later on and perhaps the battle itself, for Stalin used the delay to pour thousands of reinforcements into the ruins. Finally, on September 7, Paulus began his advance. His drive was methodical; he had to clear a block at a time, because the Russians fought for every building and launched dozens of local counterattacks. Casualties on both sides were extremely heavy, but Paulus finally penetrated to the Volga on September 20, cutting the 62nd Army in two. Meanwhile, five miles to the south, General Werner Kempf's XXXXVIII Panzer Corps of the 4th Panzer Army was handed over to Paulus, who used it to clear the southern district of Stalingrad—a mission for which it was totally unsuited. Paulus, in fact, wasted his mobile units in street fighting—a job that foot soldiers should have handled.

The Battle of Stalingrad was fought in rubble. The Russians used the bomb craters and ruined buildings as positions for platoons, squads, sections, and individual snipers—hundreds of snipers. The fighting deteriorated into dozens of local actions against individual positions and buildings, all fought under the most savage conditions, with little quarter asked for or given. The German infantry called it *Rattenkrieg*: the war of the rats.

Back at his command post at Golubinsky, west of Stalingrad, General Paulus was showing signs of strain. He developed an uncontrollable tic in his left eye and became increasingly nervous. Unwilling or

unable to see that he was stuck, he brought almost his entire army eastward into the cauldron, leaving Weichs to cover his rear with ''allied'' divisions: Italians, Romanians, and Hungarians. Victor von Schwelder, the veteran commander of the IV Corps, expressed concern that 6th Army was at the apex of a giant bulge, which was covered by unreliable foreign allies. He questioned the advisability of this strategy and thus indirectly questioned the strategic genius of the Fuehrer himself. Hitler sacked him immediately. General von Wietersheim, the highly competent commander of the XIV Panzer Corps, objected to the way Paulus was conducting the battle. He was relieved of his command by Paulus on September 15 and was replaced by the tough Lieutenant General Hans Valentin Hube. Wietersheim ended the war as a private in the Volkssturm. Baron Wolfram von Richthofen, who had replaced Loehr as commander-in-chief of the 4th Air Fleet, was highly critical of Paulus's conduct of the battle, but, as a Luftwaffe general known to be pro-Nazi, nothing was done to him. But no changes were made at 6th Army, either.

Paulus resumed his frontal assaults on October 2, but they had to be cancelled on October 6, because of declining infantry strength. He struck again on October 14 and, by October 23, 90 percent of Stalingrad was in German hands, but Paulus's units were depleted and he was almost out of ammunition. As had been the case the previous year, the ''General Mud'' had taken over in the German rear, strangling 6th Army's supply lines. Stalin, meanwhile, threw more troops into the fighting, no doubt delighted that Hitler had allowed himself to be lured into a battle of attrition in an urban area, where all of the advantages were with the defense. By early October, he had already reinforced Chuikov with nine infantry divisions, two tank brigades, and an independent rifle brigade. When these were gone, he simply threw in more. Meanwhile, the foot battalions of one German division fell to an average strength of three officers and 73 NCOs and enlisted men.[3]

Paulus, meanwhile, regrouped and attacked again on November 10. His assault forces consisted of four fresh engineer battalions (about 2,400 men), which had been specially trained for urban combat and flown in from Germany. Within 48 hours, all four battalions had been pinned down and cut to ribbons. Paulus's offensive had failed. It turned out to be his last.

THE TRAP IS SPRUNG

In the fall of 1942, Weichs's Army Group B included the German 4th Panzer and 6th Armies, as well as the Hungarian 2nd, Italian 8th, and the Romanian 3rd and 4th Armies, the last of which was in the process of forming. While the 4th Panzer and 6th Armies drove on

Stalingrad, Weichs used the Italian 8th and Romanian 3rd armies to cover the northern flank of the 6th Army and, by mid-November, was in the process of committing the Romanian 4th Army to cover Paulus's southern flank, along with the 4th Panzer Army (Figure 41.1 shows these dispositions and the situation on the Eastern Front as of November 15.) By this time, however, Hitler had dissipated the strength of the 4th Panzer, sending its best units to Stalingrad, the Caucasus, and even to France, leaving Hoth with only four German divisions (including only one panzer and one motorized division) and the Romanian VI Corps (two Romanian divisions).

Weichs was not insensitive to the threat posed to the 6th Army by using unreliable and ill-equipped allies to cover his flanks and rear, and he pointed out the dangers to OKH. Even Hitler became concerned. On November 9, he said, ''If only this front were held by German formations, I would not lose a moment's sleep over it. But this is different. The 6th Army really must make an end of this business and take the remaining parts of Stalingrad quickly.''[4]

By the second week in November, Weichs had concluded that there would definitely be a major offensive in the zone of the Romanian 3rd Army and probably against the 4th Panzer Army as well. Since all of his German reserves had been committed at Stalingrad, Weichs created a new one, under Headquarters, XXXXVIII Panzer Corps, which was now commanded by Lieutenant General Ferdinand Heim, the former chief of staff of the 6th Army. Weichs moved Heim's corps headquarters to the rear of the Romanian 3rd Army but could give him only the weak 22nd Panzer Division and the Romanian 1st Armored Division. The latter amounted to little, however, since it had only 122 tanks—mostly obsolete Czech T-38s, which weighed only nine tons, and a few old PzKw IIIs, armed with outmoded 50-millimeter guns.

On November 10, an increasingly nervous Adolf Hitler ordered the 22nd Panzer Division to move 150 miles to the north, to support General Petre Dumitrescu's 3rd Romanian Army. This division, however, had been in reserve and had dug in its tanks and covered them with straw, because of the increasing cold. Of its 104 tanks, 39 would not start, and most of the rest fell out during the road march. Mice had nested in the straw that covered the panzers and had eaten the rubber insulation off the wiring, causing massive electrical failures. Only 42 tanks would be in place on November 19.

The Romanians were ill-prepared for an attack of any sort. Their divisions had only one 37-millimeter anti-tank gun per company, and this weapon was practically useless against all but the lightest Soviet tanks. Even so, they failed to do what could have been done to improve their forward positions.

Figure 41.1
The Eastern Front, November 15, 1942

Meanwhile, the Russians concentrated 10 armies against the Romanian 3rd. On November 19, they struck this 40-mile sector with a million men, supported by 900 new T-34 tanks, 1,115 airplanes, and more than 13,500 guns—the greatest concentration of firepower yet achieved on the Eastern Front. As soon as the Reds committed their armor, the Romanians were seized with ''tank fright.'' Major Hans-Ulrich Rudel, the Stuka pilot, led his group in support of the Romanians, and remembered the scene:

> Masses in brown uniforms—are they Russians? No. Romanians. Some of them are even throwing away their rifles in order to be able to run the faster: a shocking sight.... [We reach] our allies' artillery emplacements. The guns are abandoned, not destroyed. We have passed some distance beyond them before we sight the first Soviet troops.
>
> We find all the Romanian positions in front of them deserted. We attack with bomb and gun-fire—but how much use is that when there is no resistance on the ground?
>
> We are seized with a blind fury.... Relentlessly I drop my bombs on the enemy and spray bursts of M.G. fire into these shoreless yellow-green waves of oncoming troops that surge up against us out of Asia and the Mongolian hinterland. I haven't a bullet left ...
>
> On the return flight we again observe the fleeing Romanians; it is a good thing for them I have run out of ammunition.[5]

By nightfall on November 19, the Reds had ripped a 50-mile gap in the Romanian front and had committed their pursuit forces. The following day, they attacked Weichs's southern flank. Once again the Romanian elements ran away, allowing the Soviets to split the 4th Panzer Army in two. The 29th Motorized Division and Headquarters, IV Corps escaped to the north, into the Stalingrad pocket, along with two infantry divisions. Hoth fell back to the south; all he had left was his own headquarters, two disintegrating Romanian divisions, and the 16th Motorized Division, which had to cut its way out of an encirclement to reach the 4th Panzer Army.

November 20 was the decisive day of the battle. General Heim counterattacked desperately with his little corps, but it ran straight into the 2nd Guards Tank Army and was soon crushed and swept aside; in the end, it only narrowly managed to escape across the Chir with the remnants of the 22nd Panzer. Hitler was so furious at this weak performance that he ordered Heim arrested, and he was held in prison without trial until August 1943.

Paulus, meanwhile, could do nothing to prevent the impending encirclement. Sixth Army had three panzer divisions (the 14th, 16th, and 24th), but none of them had more than 60 operational tanks. In addition, 40 percent of Paulus's battalions were considered too

exhausted to be battleworthy, and many of his 20 divisions could not move their artillery or heavy equipment because their horses had been taken west of the Don, where they would find fodder—an item in short supply on the Volga Steppe.[6]

On November 21, both Russian spearheads pivoted 90 degrees into the Paulus's rear and scattered his command post. On the afternoon of November 22, the Russian 21st and 51st Armies linked up, completing the encirclement of the 6th Army. Figure 41.2 shows the encirclement and the development of the Stalingrad pocket.

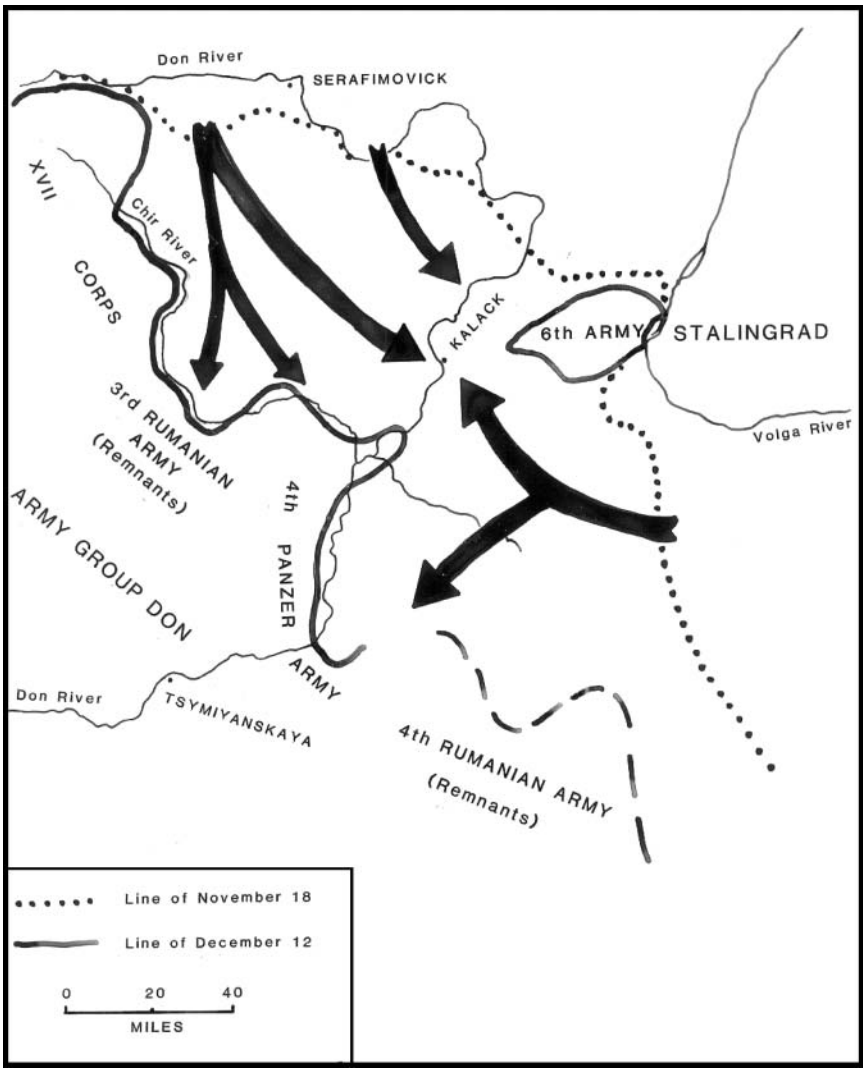
THE STALINGRAD AIRLIFT

On November 21, even before the Russians could complete their encirclement, Adolf Hitler issued a fatal order: 6th Army was to stand fast in Stalingrad, despite the fact that it was in danger of being surrounded. The Luftwaffe would resupply it by air, he declared, if that became necessary.

Meanwhile, Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering thought he saw an opportunity in the disastrous situation between the Volga and the Chir. His standing at Fuehrer Headquarters had been deteriorating since the loss of the Battle of Britain, and this decline had accelerated in 1942, because of the Allied bombings of the Fatherland and the rise of Martin Bormann, who had replaced Rudolf Hess as the Fuehrer's secretary in May 1941. Before Bormann had been in office for long, he had Hitler living in virtual isolation, because ''the secretary'' was able to freeze out those whom he disliked from contact with the dictator. As his influence with and over the Fuehrer grew, Bormann used it to strengthen the party's position against the Wehrmacht and the SS—and against Hermann Goering and the Luftwaffe. With such an enemy constantly whispering derogatory comments in Hitler's ear, Goering's decline in the eyes of the Fuehrer was predictable, even if the Luftwaffe performed up to expectations, which it did not. By late 1942, the Reichsmarschall felt the only way he could recapture some of his lost prestige with Hitler was to score a spectacular military victory. He therefore promised Hitler that the Luftwaffe would resupply Stalingrad by air.

The military experts involved in the operation were unanimously opposed to the airlift. ''Supply an entire army by air?'' General of Fliers Martin Fiebig, whose VIII Air Corps was supporting 6th Army, cried when he received the order. ''Impossible!''[7] That same day Fiebig's commander, Baron von Richthofen, signaled Goering, Zietzler, and Field Marshal von Manstein that it was an impossible task. He also telephoned Colonel General Hans Jeschonnek, the chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, and screamed at him, ''You've got to stop it [the

Figure 41.2
The Stalingrad Encirclement



airlift]! In this miserable weather there's no way to supply an army of 250,000 men from the air. It's madness!''[8] Jeschonnek, who always listened to Richthofen, promptly revised his original estimate, which called for Paulus to stand fast, and on November 22 he strongly recommended that 6th Army break out. Like Weichs, Manstein, Richthofen, Fiebig, and others, he was ignored, both by Goering and Hitler. Only

Keitel and Jodl—OKW officers who were in no way responsible for the actual conduct of operations—backed the Fuehrer's decision, and Jodl later changed his mind. Even Dr. Goebbels opposed the airlift and almost succeeded in persuading Hitler to let 6th Army break out while there was still time.

Hitler never did ask Paulus for his opinion and only seriously discussed the airlift once, on November 24 (three days after he issued the original order), when Kurt Zeitzler, the chief of the General Staff of Army and the most outspoken critic of the plan, confronted Goering in his presence at Fuehrer Headquarters. Zeitzler began by stating in no uncertain terms that the airlift was impossible. This led to a heated conference, which went like this:

HITLER: ''Goering, can you keep the 6th Army supplied by air?''
GOERING (with solemn confidence): ''My Fuehrer! I assure you that the Luftwaffe can keep the 6th Army supplied.''
ZEITZLER: ''The Luftwaffe certainly cannot.''
GOERING (scowling): ''You are not in a position to give an opinion on the subject.''
ZEITZLER: ''My Fuehrer! May I ask the Reichsmarschall a question?''
HITLER: ''Yes, you may.''
ZEITZLER: ''Herr Reichsmarschall, do you know what tonnage has to be flown in every day?''
GOERING (embarrassed): ''I don't, but my staff officers do.''

Zeitzler stated that the minimum was 300 tons per day. Allowing for bad weather, that meant 500 tons per day was the ''irreducible minimum average.''
GOERING: ''I can do that.''
ZEITZLER (losing his temper): ''My Fuehrer! That is a lie!''

An icy silence descended on the conference. Zeitzler later recalled that Goering was white with fury.
HITLER: ''The Reichsmarschall has made his report to me, which I have no choice but to believe. I therefore abide by my original decision [to resupply Stalingrad by air, instead of allowing the 6th Army to break out].''[9]

This was the turning point of the war.

On November 24, Hitler dispatched his famous order commanding 6th Army to stand fast, without thought of withdrawing. No breakout would be allowed. The following day, Baron von Richthofen telephoned Goering (now in Paris) and urged him to use his influence with the Fuehrer to obtain permission for 6th Army to break out to the southwest. Goering answered that he would do nothing of the sort, so Richthofen contacted the dictator directly. Hitler, however, refused to reconsider his decision, because he did not believe that the Wehrmacht would ever reach Stalingrad again if he withdrew now.

Once the decision had been made, Richthofen did his best to carry out his orders. ''We have only one chance to cling to,'' he said. ''So far

the Fuehrer has always been right, even when none of us could understand his actions and most of us strongly advised against them.''[10] The Red Baron's cousin said this even though he knew the results of the airlift could be predicted mathematically before it began. Sixth Army needed 500 tons of supplies per day. To provide this would require 500 operational Ju-52 transports, which could carry one ton each. Richthofen had only 298 Ju-52s, fewer than half of which were operational. In addition, the Luftwaffe in November 1942 was undergoing its greatest strain of the war, because it was also having to supply Army Group Afrika in Libya and Tunisia, in addition to its massive commitment on the Eastern Front. As a result, Richthofen had to employ He-111 bombers (which could transport a half a ton of supplies each) as emergency transports, but there were not enough of these available to make much difference. Nevertheless, the airlift began on November 29. By December 9, the Luftwaffe was delivering an average of 84.4 tons of supplies per day—less than a fifth of the amount required. To make matters worse, the Luftwaffe (ever jealous of its prerogatives) refused to let army quartermasters oversee the cargo shipments. The result, as one author put it, was a ''ludicrous mess.''[11] One day, four tons of jam and pepper were landed, followed by thousands of right shoes. Finally, Goering's air force delivered several million contraceptives to the starving troops of the 6th Army. The Luftwaffe never came close to delivering 500 tons of supplies to Stalingrad—not even for a single day. In fact, its maximum daily delivery was 290 tons; its average daily delivery was only 94 tons.

Kurt Zeitzler, meanwhile, never ceased to agitate for a breakout attempt. After Hitler snapped at him that the subject was closed, Zeitzler found a way to bring it up indirectly. He put his entire staff on the same diet as that of the troops in Stalingrad. They soon visibly lost weight. Meanwhile, inside the pocket, most of the generals wanted to break out at once. As we have seen, however, Friedrich Paulus could be mentally dominated by men of stronger will. Following the death of von Reichenau, Paulus allowed himself to be guided by the perceived infallibility of the Fuehrer and dominated by the strong will of his own chief of staff, Major General Arthur Schmidt.

Schmidt, a bachelor, was born in Hamburg in 1895, the son of a merchant. Like Paulus, he did not come from a military tradition, but he volunteered for the army when World War I broke out in 1914 and became a dedicated soldier. Unfortunately, the hard-working Schmidt lacked command experience and—even more seriously—was a true believer in the genius of the Fuehrer, just like his army commander. Like Paulus, he was a master of detail, but there the similarity ended, for Schmidt lacked Paulus's conscience, good breeding, and polished manners. He was an autocratic, rude, overbearing bully who was

thoroughly disliked by most of the officers with whom he came into contact. Unfortunately, as the situation at Stalingrad deteriorated, Paulus's self-confidence declined, and he allowed himself (and 6th Army) to be guided more and more by his chief of staff, until Arthur Schmidt was virtually conducting the battle for the German side. Schmidt was not a man of great tactical skill, daring, or initiative; rather, he was characterized by a stubborn optimism, tenacity, and a willingness to obey the orders of his superiors without question. These characteristics of Paulus and Schmidt would prove to be fatal to the trapped garrison of Stalingrad.

At the beginning of the encirclement, Paulus favored an immediate breakout attempt (even though Schmidt did not), and sent a message to that effect to Army Group B on November 21. The next day, he and Schmidt met with Hermann Hoth and Major General Wolfgang Pickert, the commander of the 9th Flak Division. Schmidt asked Pickert, an old friend, what they should do now. ''Get the hell out of here!'' was Pickert's frank reply. The gifted Hoth also recommended an immediate breakout, but Schmidt replied that there was no need to panic, and nothing in the present tactical situation justified making decisions independent of Rastenburg. Paulus did not open his mouth during the entire conference, except to agree with his chief of staff.[12]

Once he received the Fuehrer's order, Paulus set aside his own professional opinion and accepted Hitler's decision with an attitude of almost detached resignation. This listless and almost lifeless obsequiousness characterized Paulus's attitude for the rest of the battle.

On November 27, the corps commanders of the 6th Army unanimously urged Paulus to order a breakout on his own initiative. General von Seydlitz-Kurzbach, commander of the LI Corps, urged him to ''take the course of the Lion,'' a reference to General Karl von Litzmann, who made a daring breakout against orders in November 1914. ''A breakout is our only chance!'' General Hube, the one-armed commander of the XIV Panzer Corps, declared. ''We can't just remain here and die!'' cried General Karl Strecker, the commander of the XI Corps. General Walter Heitz (Commanding General [CG], VIII Corps), a strong Nazi, also called for an immediate breakout, regardless of casualties. It would be better to escape with only five divisions, he declared, than to die with 20.

''Reichenau would have brushed aside all doubts,'' General Erwin Jaenecke, the commander of the IV Corps, commented.

''I am no Reichenau,'' Paulus replied gravely.

Jaenecke, a close personal friend of Paulus's, put heavy pressure on him. Seydlitz informed the conferees that he had already ordered his corps to destroy all surplus equipment that could not be carried on a long march. He had personally set the example by burning everything

he had except the uniform he was wearing. All of the corps commanders expressed their approval and advocated a breakout, in spite of Hitler's orders.

''We must obey,'' Schmidt said.

''I shall obey,'' Paulus answered.

''In spite of his intelligence,'' Jaenecke wrote later, ''Colonel General Paulus was far too pliable to cope with Hitler. I am convinced that this is the real and deeper cause of his failure.''[13]

Ironically, when he learned that Seydlitz' corps was preparing for an unauthorized breakout, Hitler assumed that Paulus was preparing to disobey him. He therefore removed LI Corps from the control of 6th Army and placed it directly under the command of OKH, in effect making Seydlitz independent of Paulus's orders. Paulus, at least, recognized the irony of this situation, but Walter von Seydlitz was too furious to see anything except red. He promptly signaled Baron von Weichs, the commander-in-chief of Army Group B: ''To remain inactive is a crime from the military viewpoint, and it is a crime from the point of view of responsibility of the German people.''[14]

Weichs did not reply. And 6th Army did not move.

MANSTEIN TAKES CHARGE

Almost as soon as the Soviet pincers closed around 6th Army, Hitler correctly decided that the uninspiring Baron von Weichs was not the man to rescue it. If anyone could salvage the southern sector of the Russian Front, it was Erich von Manstein.

''The general verdict among the German generals I interrogated in 1945 was that Field Marshal von Manstein had proved the ablest commander in their army, and the man they had most desired to become Commander-in-Chief,'' B. H. Liddell Hart recalled.[15] This was the opinion of Field Marshal Rommel (the Desert Fox), Gerd von Rundstedt, the senior German field marshal, and even Heinz Guderian, the father of the blitzkrieg and a man not easily impressed by anyone other than himself, and there were many others. Even Hitler said, ''Manstein is perhaps the best brain that the General Staff Corps has produced.''[16] He was universally respected and even held somewhat in awe by the German generals—a class not exactly known for its lack of personal ego. This is precisely why Hitler feared him.

Manstein was born to be a general. When he first saw the light of day, in Berlin on November 24, 1887, his name was Fritz Erich von Lewinski. His father was General of Artillery Eduard von Lewinski, the product of a distinguished Prussian military family that traced its heritage back to the Teutonic knights. Field Marshal von Hindenburg was the baby's uncle. Erich, however, was the tenth child born to the

Lewinski family, and Frau von Lewinski's sister (Frau von Manstein) was childless, so the Lewinskis gave him to her. (That was how uncontested adoptions were handled in the nineteenth century.) Erich's adopted father was a lieutenant general and he eventually took his name, becoming Fritz Erich von Lewinski gennant von Manstein—Erich von Manstein for short.

Manstein was educated in various cadet schools and entered the Imperial Army as an officer cadet in the elite 3rd Prussian Foot Guard Regiment in 1906. He distinguished himself as a General Staff officer in World War I (despite being seriously wounded) and continued his advancement during the Reichswehr and Wehrmacht eras, finally being named deputy chief of the General Staff in 1936. In this position he tried to shield Jewish servicemen from discriminatory Nazi regulations. He lost his job because of his anti-Nazi attitude in 1938, but was considered too competent to be sent into retirement, so he was given command of the 18th Infantry Division. As chief of staff of Army Group A in late 1939, he devised the plan that led to the conquest of France in six weeks. Later, he led the LVI Panzer Corps in the invasion of the Soviet Union, with a great deal of success. When Ritter von Schobert was killed in action in the fall of 1941 (when his airplane made an emergency landing in what turned out to be a Russian minefield), Manstein succeeded him as commander of the 11th Army. In 1942, he captured the Soviet naval fortress of Sevastopol, which had earned him his marshal's baton. Afterward, Hitler sent Manstein's army to Army Group North, where he severed a major Soviet penetration at its base, destroying seven infantry divisions, six infantry brigades, and four armored brigades in the process. More than 300 guns, 500 mortars, and 244 tanks were captured or destroyed. When the Russians encircled Stalingrad, his Headquarters, 11th Army, was upgraded to Headquarters, Army Group Don, and Manstein received the most critical and demanding orders of his military career: rescue 6th Army and stabilize the southern sector of the Eastern Front. He also had the task of preventing the Russians from reaching Rostov and cutting off Army Group A in the Caucasus. Unfortunately for Manstein, he had little with which to work. When he arrived, he had only (north to south) the XVII Corps on the Chir; the remnants of the Romanian 3rd Army, which was nearly useless; the weak 4th Panzer Army; and the remnants of the Romanian 4th Army. He was facing 10 Soviet combined arms armies; a tank army; four air armies; several independent cavalry, tank, and mechanized corps; and more than 100 independent tank, artillery, anti-tank, combat engineer, and other regiments—excluding the Soviet forces surrounding the 6th Army in Stalingrad.[17]

Almost as soon as Army Group Don was activated on November 27, Manstein divided it into two German Armeegruppen: Hoth and

Hollidt. The initial reinforcements all went to General Hollidt, while the Headquarters of the LVII Panzer Corps was transferred from the 17th Army in the Caucasus to organize the breakthrough to Stalingrad. By mid-December, Group Hoth had been reinforced with Kirchner's LVII Panzer, which controlled the weak 23rd Panzer Division (transferred from Army Group A) and the full-strength 6th Panzer Division (just arriving from France). The 5th SS Panzer Grenadier and 17th Panzer Divisions were added later, but the 17th Panzer amounted to little: it only had 30 operational tanks and no armored cars, and one company from each panzer grenadier battalion had to march behind the division on foot, because of a shortage of motorized vehlcles.[18]

During the last days of November and the first days of December, while his new divisions arrived, it was all Manstein could do to hold off Soviet attacks across the Chir and the Aksai. In the meantime, he planned his relief attack. The Soviets expected him to take the shortest route, from a bridgehead at Verkhnaya Chirskaya, north and east of the confluence of the Don and Chir, and less than 40 miles from the southwest corner of the Stalingrad perimeter. Manstein, however, realized that the Russians were concentrating there, so he attacked along the Kotelnikovo-Stalingrad railroad, across more than 80 miles of open, shelterless steppe. This approach was defended by only five Soviet divisions.

Due to bad weather and the low capacity of the Soviet railroads, Manstein's relief attempt, codenamed Operation Winter Storm, could not start until December 12, when Kirchner attacked with 230 tanks and assault guns, which were well supported by the IV Air Corps, just up from the Caucasus. Just as Manstein hoped, Kirchner's attack took the Soviets by surprise, and he gained 12 miles on the first day, despite atrocious weather. The Reds, however, reacted quickly, and by December 14 had committed two mechanized corps and two tank brigades from the Stalingrad area against LVII Panzer. That day a tank battle began at Verkhne-Kumski. When it ended three days later, 11th Panzer Regiment alone had destroyed about 400 Soviet tanks. Kirchner was able to push within 30 miles of Stalingrad, but was not able to break the back of the Soviet defense. In the meantime, Stalin awakened to the danger and committed the elite 2nd Guards Army against Kirchner. Meanwhile, on December 16, several Soviet armies with more than 1,000 tanks attacked the 8th Italian Army (of Weichs's Army Group B). Their objectives were to break through, then turn south into Manstein's rear and capture the airfields that were being used to resupply Stalingrad. Within a few days, the Italian Army was completely routed and fleeing to the east, having lost or abandoned almost all of its artillery and heavy equipment. By December 19, the Russian spearheads had overrun the major supply base of Kantemirovka, capturing tons of

ammunition, food, and fuel. There were no German reserves in this sector, so the Soviet tanks were able to advance 150 miles in five days and, on Christmas Eve, launched a surprise attack on Tatsinkskaya, the main Ju-52 airfield, 50 miles in the rear of Group Hollidt. Many of the air and ground crews were still asleep when the Russians struck, and losses in men and material were devastating. Seventy Ju-52s were destroyed, along with irreplaceable cold weather avionics equipment. Group Hollidt was in danger of being cut off and destroyed, and there was a real possibility that a Soviet thrust might take Rostov, cutting off Army Groups A and much of Army Group Don—which is exactly what Stalin intended to do.

Manstein called on Paulus to break out on December 19, and even Hitler gave conditional approval, but Paulus hesitated. He estimated that he had only enough fuel to travel 18 miles—no more. Manstein sent his Ic (intelligence officer), Major Georg Eismann, to Stalingrad, to reason with Paulus and Schmidt; but to no avail. ''What ultimately decided the attitude of 6th Army Headquarters,'' Manstein wrote later, ''was the opinion of the chief of staff . . . 'Sixth Army,' he told Eismann, 'will still be in position at Easter. All you people have to do is to supply it better'.'' Manstein concluded that all of Eismann's remonstrances ''were like water off a duck's back.''[19]

On December 26, the temperature dropped to −15° F. Inside Stalingrad, the physical condition of the soldiers deteriorated rapidly and the combat strength of 6th Army declined alarmingly. Men suddenly started dropping dead for no apparent reason. OKW flew a distinguished anatomist from Berlin into the pocket, to conduct an investigation. Autopsies revealed that death was caused by a combination of undernourishment, overwork, exhaustion, and exposure, which caused the heart to shrink, except for the right ventricle, which greatly enlarged. This condition was normally found only in the very old.[20] The troops went on one-third rations on November 23, and almost all of the horses had been eaten by mid-December. ''Horse-meat is not so bad at all,'' Corporal Schaffstein of the 226th Infantry Regiment wrote in his diary on December 9. ''It's a jolly sight worse to go hungry.''[21] The troops washed their meager rations down with what they called ''German tea''—which was melted snow.[22] As of December 7, 6th Army was living on one loaf of stale bread for every five soldiers.

Every day, the German ranks were depleted by wounds, dysentery, typhus, spotted fever, and frostbite. Still they gave ground only slowly and the defense continued to be stubborn, even though 6th Army was gradually crushed, one unit at a time.

On Christmas Day, 1942, Paulus authorized the slaughtering of 400 horses for food as a holiday gift for his men. Later that week, he was forced to reduce rations again, to a daily allowance of two ounces of bread, one bowl of soup (without fat) for lunch, and one can of

unsalted meat for dinner per man. Often this was not available. The panzer and motorized divisions suffered worst of all, because they had no horses to eat.

THE DEATH OF AN ARMY

To meet the emergency caused by the collapse of the Italian 8th Army, Manstein had no choice but to withdraw the 6th Panzer Division from Kirchner's corps. He took this step with a heavy heart, for he knew that the loss of this division ended all chances of resuming the breakthrough to Stalingrad; however, by now, the Russians were within 75 miles of Rostov. Manstein, a commander with nerves of steel, only withdrew the 6th Panzer when it was absolutely necessary to save Rostov and to prevent the Soviets from cutting off Army Group A and the 4th Panzer Army. As it was, the Reds penetrated to within 15 miles of Rostov before they were checked by Manstein's last reserves.

The reduction of the Stalingrad pocket was left to General Andrei Ivanovich Yeremenko's Stalingrad Front and Konstantin K. Rokossovsky's Don Front: seven armies in all. They were supported by 7,000 guns and by the 16th Air Army, which established air superiority over the battle zone. Another major offensive against the trapped 6th Army began on January 10, against the western portion of the perimeter. The Soviets gained five miles the first day, decimated the 44th Infantry Division, and virtually destroyed the 29th Motorized and 376th Infantry Divisions. The fighting was heavy and bitter, in temperatures below −20° F. Even so, the pocket, which originally extended 40 miles west to east and 20 miles north to south, had been reduced by half by January 17. Even more seriously, six of the seven airstrips had been lost, including Pitomnik (on January 11), the main air base, and the only one with night-landing facilities. The only airstrip left was Gumrak, but it was frequently out of commission because of enemy bombing and shelling and high snow. Air supply continued via parachute drops, but this method was inefficient and inaccurate. Even those canisters that landed in German territory were not properly collected and distributed, because 6th Army's internal organization had broken down.

The Reds launched another offensive on January 22; Gumrak fell that day, and the German defense at last began to collapse. On January 25, the Russians broke through the western perimeter and penetrated to the Tractor Works, where they linked up with Chuikov's 62nd Army, cutting the pocket in two and isolating XI Corps to the north. Paulus ordered that rations no longer be issued to the wounded. Only those who could fight were to be fed. He signaled Hitler, ''Your orders are being executed. Long live Germany!''[23]

Privately, Paulus was in despair. He told a pilot that his men had nothing to eat for four days. ''Can you imagine soldiers falling upon the carcass of a horse, smashing his head open and eating its brains raw?'' he asked.[24] But Hitler had ordered him not to surrender, and, to Paulus, the Fuehrer had to be obeyed at all costs, so the unequal battle continued. By now, there were 20,000 unattended wounded lying in the streets.

The southern pocket was cut in half on January 28, and Paulus's headquarters was isolated in the southernmost of the three pockets, where it was guarded by the remnants of Major General Alexander von Hartmann's 71st Infantry Division.

On January 30, the 76th Infantry Division was overwhelmed. Near Railroad Station Number 1, the Headquarters, XIV Panzer Corps, was surrounded and forced to capitulate. General Hube had been flown out on Hitler's orders a few days before, and the corps was surrendered by Lieutenant General Hellmut Schloemer. In the northern pocket, a number of T-34 tanks broke through to the joint command bunker of the VIII and LI Corps. Walter von Seydlitz, Walter Heitz, and five other generals were captured.

As his command was bleeding to death, General Hartmann stood up on an embankment and deliberately exposed himself to Soviet fire. He was promptly cut down. Shortly after midnight on January 31, at the urging of General Zeitzler, Hitler—despite his personal misgivings—promoted Paulus to the rank of field marshal. Because no field marshal had been captured in German history, this was a clear invitation to Paulus to commit suicide. Paulus ignored the hint. He and his staff surrendered that morning, and fighting in the southern pocket ended. The northern pocket, under the command of General Strecker, continued to resist until February 2.

The Soviets took about 91,000 prisoners, including 24 generals and 2,500 other officers, when Stalingrad fell. Sources disagree over the total number of German casualties, but the commonly accepted figure is 230,000. This number, of course, excludes thousands killed or captured before and during the encirclement. By any measure, for the Third Reich, the disaster was enormous. It lost the headquarters and entire command organization of the 6th Army; five corps headquarters; 13 infantry divisions; three panzer divisions, three motorized divisions; and the 9th Flak Division: 20 of its best divisions. Losses in panzers and motorized vehicles were the equivalent of six months' new production. The equivalent of four months' production of artillery and two months' production of small arms and mortars were also lost.[25]

The losses suffered by Germany's allies were also terrible. Romania lost an estimated 300,000 men, Italy 130,000, and Hungary 120,000. Total Axis losses were in the neighborhood of three-quarters of a million men.

Luftwaffe losses were also devastating: 488 aircraft, including 266 Ju-52s, 165 He-111s, 42 Ju-86s, nine FW-200s, five He-177s, and a Ju-290. ''There died the core of the German bomber fleet,'' Goering moaned later. Typically, he immediately looked for scapegoats and announced his intention to court-martial Jeschonnek and General of Fliers Hans-Georg von Seidel, the quartermaster general of the Luftwaffe, because they were responsible for the Stalingrad catastrophe.[26] Hitler, however, refused to allow Goering to proceed with his court-martial. He knew where the real blame lay.

Publicly, the ministry of propaganda announced that the heroic 6th Army, under the exemplary leadership of Field Marshal Paulus, had been overwhelmed by a numerically superior enemy. Privately, Hitler fiercely berated Paulus, declared that he had made an about-face on the threshold of history, and promised to court-martial him after the war. He also swore that he would create no more field marshals in this war—an oath that he did not keep. Ironically, von Weichs, Ewald von Kleist, and Ernst Busch all received their promotions to field marshal on February 1, 1943.

For the 91,000 prisoners, there followed an endless series of hunger marches. The thinly guarded prisoner-of-war columns were frequently attacked by bands of civilian marauders, who fell on the sick and wounded. The men who dropped out of their columns were never seen again. Even the prisoners who were put on trains or trucks were not properly fed, and only about half of the captives ever reached the prisoner-of-war camps in Siberia. There, most of them died of malnutrition or from various epidemics. Fewer than 7,000 of them ever saw Germany again.

NOTES

1. Walter Goerlitz, *Paulus and Stalingrad* (1974), pp. 10–12.
2. Shaw et al., p. 136.
3. Ziemke, p. 46.
4. Dana V. Sadarananda, *Beyond Stalingrad* (1990), p. 7 (hereafter cited as Sadarananda).
5. Hans Ulrich Rudel, *Stuka Pilot* (1958; reprint ed., 1979), p. 73.
6. Seaton, *Russo-German War*, pp. 310–14.
7. Plocher MS 1942.
8. James D. Carnes, ''A Study in Courage: General Walther von Seydlitz' Opposition to Hitler,'' Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (1976), p. 147.
9. Plocher MS 1942; Kurt Zeitzler, ''Stalingrad,'' in *The Fatal Decisions,* William Richardson and Seymour Freidon, eds. (1956), pp. 144–45.
10. Shaw et al., p. 181.
11. Plocher MS 1942.

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. F. W. von Mellenthin, *German Generals of World War II* (1977), p. 115 (hereafter cited as Mellenthin, *German Generals*).
15. B. H. Liddell Hart, ''Foreword,'' in Manstein, p. 13.
16. Guderian, p. 241.
17. T. N. Dupuy and Paul Martell, *Great Battles on the Eastern Front* (1982), p. 69.
18. Frido von Senger und Etterlin, *Neither Fear Nor Hope*, George Malcolm, trans. (1963; reprint ed., 1989), p. 63.
19. Mellenthin, *German Generals*, p. 211.
20. Shaw et al., p. 182.
21. *True to Type*, p. 75.
22. Hanson W. Baldwin, *Battles Won and Lost* (1976), p. 174.
23. Carell, *Scorched Earth* (1991), p. 214.
24. Manstein, pp. 433–34.
25. Sadarananda, pp. 145–46.
26. Seidel (1891–1955) later commanded the 10th Air Fleet (1944–45), which was the Luftwaffe's replacement air fleet.

APPENDIX 1

TABLE OF COMPARATIVE RANKS

U.S. Army	German Army and Luftwaffe
——	Reichsmarschall (Luftwaffe only)[a]
General of the Army	Field Marshal (Generalfeldmarschall)
General	Colonel General (Generaloberst)
Lieutenant General	General of (Infantry, Panzer Troops, etc.)
Major General	Lieutenant General (Generalleutnant)
Brigadier General[b]	Major General (Generalmajor)
Colonel	Colonel (Oberst)
Lieutenant Colonel	Lieutenant Colonel (Oberstleutnant)
Major	Major (Major)
Captain	Captain (Hauptmann)
First Lieutenant	First Lieutenant (Oberleutnant)
Second Lieutenant	Second Lieutenant (Leutnant)
——	Senior Officer Cadet or Ensign (Faehnrich)
Officer Candidate	Officer-Cadet (Fahnenjunker)
Master Sergeant	Sergeant Major (Stabsfeldwebel)
First Sergeant	——
Technical Sergeant	Technical Sergeant (Oberfeldwebel)
Staff Sergeant	Staff Sergeant (Feldwebel)
Sergeant	Sergeant (Unterfeldwebel)
Corporal	Corporal (Unteroffizier)
——	Lance Corporal (Gefreiter)
Private First Class	Private First Class (Obersoldat)
Private	Private (Soldat, Grenadier, Jaeger, etc.)

Appendix 1

U.S. Army	Waffen–SS
General of the Army	Reichsfuehrer-SS
General	SS Colonel General (SS-Oberstgruppenfuehrer)
Lieutenant General	SS General (SS-Obergruppenfuehrer)
Major General	SS Lieutenant General (SS-Gruppenfuehrer)
Brigadier General	SS Major General (SS-Brigadefuehrer)
——	SS Oberfuehrer (SS-Oberfuehrer)
Colonel	SS Colonel (SS-Standartenfuehrer)
Lieutenant Colonel	SS Lieutenant Colonel (SS-Obersturmbannfuehrer)
Major	SS Major (SS-Sturmbannfuehrer)
Captain	SS Captain (SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer)
First Lieutenant	SS First Lieutenant (SS-Obersturmfuehrer)
Second Lieutenant	SS Second Lieutenant (SS-Untersturmfuehrer
Officer Candidate	SS Officer-Cadet (SS Fahnenjunker)
Master Sergeant	SS Sergeant Major (SS-Sturmscharfuehrer)
First Sergeant	SS First Sergeant (SS-Hauptscharfuehrer)
Technical Sergeant	SS Technical Sergeant (SS-Oberscharfuehrer)
Staff Sergeant	SS Staff Sergeant (SS-Scharfuehrer)
Sergeant	SS Sergeant (SS-Unterscharfuehrer)
Corporal	SS Corporal (SS-Rottenfuehrer)
Private First Class	SS Private First Class (SS Sturmann)
Private	SS Private (SS-Mann)
	SS Aspirant (SS-Anwaerter)

German Army/ Luftwaffe	German Navy (Officer Ranks Only)
Reichsmarschall (Luftwaffe only)	Grand Admiral (Grossadmiral)
Field Marshal (Generalfeldmarschall)	——
Colonel General (Generaloberst)	General Admiral (Generaladmiral)
General (General der . . .)	Admiral (Admiral)
Lieutenant General (Generalleutnant)	Vice Admiral (Vizeadmiral)
Major General (Generalmajor)	Rear Admiral (Konteradmiral)
——	Commodore
Colonel (Oberst)	Captain (Kapitaen zur See)
Lieutenant Colonel (Oberstleutnant)	Commander (Fregattenkapitaen)
Major (Major)	Lieutenant Commander (Korventtenkapitaen)
Captain (Hauptmann)	Lieutenant (Kapitaenleutnant)

German Army/ Luftwaffe	German Navy (Officer Ranks Only)
First Lieutenant (Oberleutnant)	Leutnant[c]
Second Lieutenant (Leutnant)	Leutnant zur See[d]
Officer-Cadet (Fahnenjunker)	Seekadett

[a]Held only by Hermann Goering (July 19, 1940–April 23, 1945).
[b]Brigadier in British Army.
[c]Equivalent to lieutenant (j.g.) in U.S. Navy.
[d]Equivalent to ensign in the U.S. Navy.

APPENDIX 2

GERMAN STAFF POSITIONS

	Chief of Staff (Not present below the corps level)
Ia	Chief of Operations
Ib	Quartermaster (Chief Supply Officer)
Ic	Staff Officer, Intelligence (subordinate to Ia)
Id	Director of Training (Not present below army level)
IIa	Chief Personnel Officer (Adjutant)
IIb	Second Personnel Officer (subordinate to IIa)
III	Chief Judge Advocate (subordinate to IIa)
IVa	Chief Administrative Officer (subordinate to Ib)
IVb	Chief Medical Officer (subordinate to Ib)
IVc	Chief Veterinary Officer (subordinate to Ib)
IVd	Chaplain (subordinate to IIa)
V	Motor Transport Officer (subordinate to Ib)
	National Socialist Guidance Officer (added 1944)
	Special Staff Officers (Chief of Artillery, Chief of Projectors [Rocket Launchers], Chief Signal Officer, etc.

Note:
The Ia was referred to as the Generalstabsoffizier 1 (1st General Staff Officer or GSO 1); the Ib was the Generalstabsoffizier 2; the Ic was the Generalstabsoffizier 3; and the Id was the Generalstabsoffizier 4.

APPENDIX 3

GERMAN ARMY CHAIN OF COMMAND: GERMAN UNITS, RANKS, AND STRENGTHS

Unit	Rank of Commander[a]	Strength
Army Group	Field Marshal	2 or more armies
Army	Colonel General	2 or more corps
Army Detachment	General	1 or more corps plus independent divisions
Corps	General	2 or more divisions
Division	Lieutenant General/Major General	10,000–18,000 men[b] and 200–350 tanks (if panzer)
Brigade[c]	Major General/Colonel	2 or more regiments
Regiment	Colonel	2–7 battalions
Battalion	Lieutenant Colonel/Major/ Captain	2 or more companies (approximately 500 men per infantry battalion; usually 50–80 tanks per panzer battalion)
Company[d]	Captain/Lieutenant	3–5 platoons
Platoon	Lieutenant/Sergeant Major	Infantry: 30–40 men; Panzer: 4 or 5 tanks
Section	Warrant Officer/Sergeant Major	2 squads (more or less)
Squad	Sergeant	Infantry: 7–10 men; Armor: 1 tank

[a]Frequently, units were commanded by lower-ranking men as the war went on.
[b]As the war progressed, the number of men and tanks in most units declined accordingly. SS units usually had more men and tanks than Army units.
[c]Brigade Headquarters were rarely used in the German Army after 1942.
[d]Called batteries in the artillery (4 or 5 guns per battery).

APPENDIX 4

CHARACTERISTICS OF SELECTED TANKS

Model	Weight (in tons)	Speed (mph)	Range (miles)	Main Armament	Crew
British					
Mark IV ''Churchill''	43.1	15	120	16-pounder	5
Mark VI ''Crusader''	22.1	27	200	12-pounder	5
Mark VIII ''Cromwell''	30.8	38	174	175mm	5
American[a]					
M3A1 ''Stuart''[b]	14.3	36	60	137mm	4
M4A3 ''Sherman''	37.1	30	120	176mm	5
German					
PzKw II	9.3	25	118	120mm	3
PzKw III	24.5	25	160	150mm	5
PzKw IV	19.7	26	125	175mm	5
PzKw V ''Panther''	49.3	25	125	175mm	5
PzKw VI ''Tiger''	62.0	23	73	188mm	5
Russian					
T34/Model 76	29.7	32	250	176mm	4
T34/Model 85	34.4	32	250	185mm	5
KV 1	52	25	208	176.2mm	5
JSII ''Joseph Stalin''	45.5	23	150	122mm	4

[a]Characteristics of each tank varied somewhat from model to model.
[b]All American tanks were also in the British inventory. The British Shermans were sometimes outfitted with a heavier main battle gun. These Shermans were called ''Fireflies.''

APPENDIX 5

LUFTWAFFE AVIATION UNITS, STRENGTHS, AND RANKS OF COMMANDERS

Unit	Composition	Rank of Commander
OKL	all Luftwaffe units	Reichsmarschall
Air Fleet	Air Corps and Air and Flak Division(s)	General to Field Marshal
Air Corps	Air and Flak Divisions plus various miscellaneous units	Major General to General
Air Division	2 or more wings	Colonel to Major General
Wings	2 or more groups	Major to Colonel; rarely Major General
Group	2 or more squadrons, 30 to 36 aircraft	Major to Lieutenant Colonel
Squadrons	2 or more sections, 9 to 12 aircraft	Lieutenant to Captain
Section	3 or 4 aircraft	Lieutenant

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